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**No. 86.** { COMPLETE. } FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 34 & 36 NORTH MOORE STREET, NEW YORK. { PRICE } **Vol. IV.**  
New York, July 27, 1894. ISSUED WEEKLY. { 5 CENTS. }

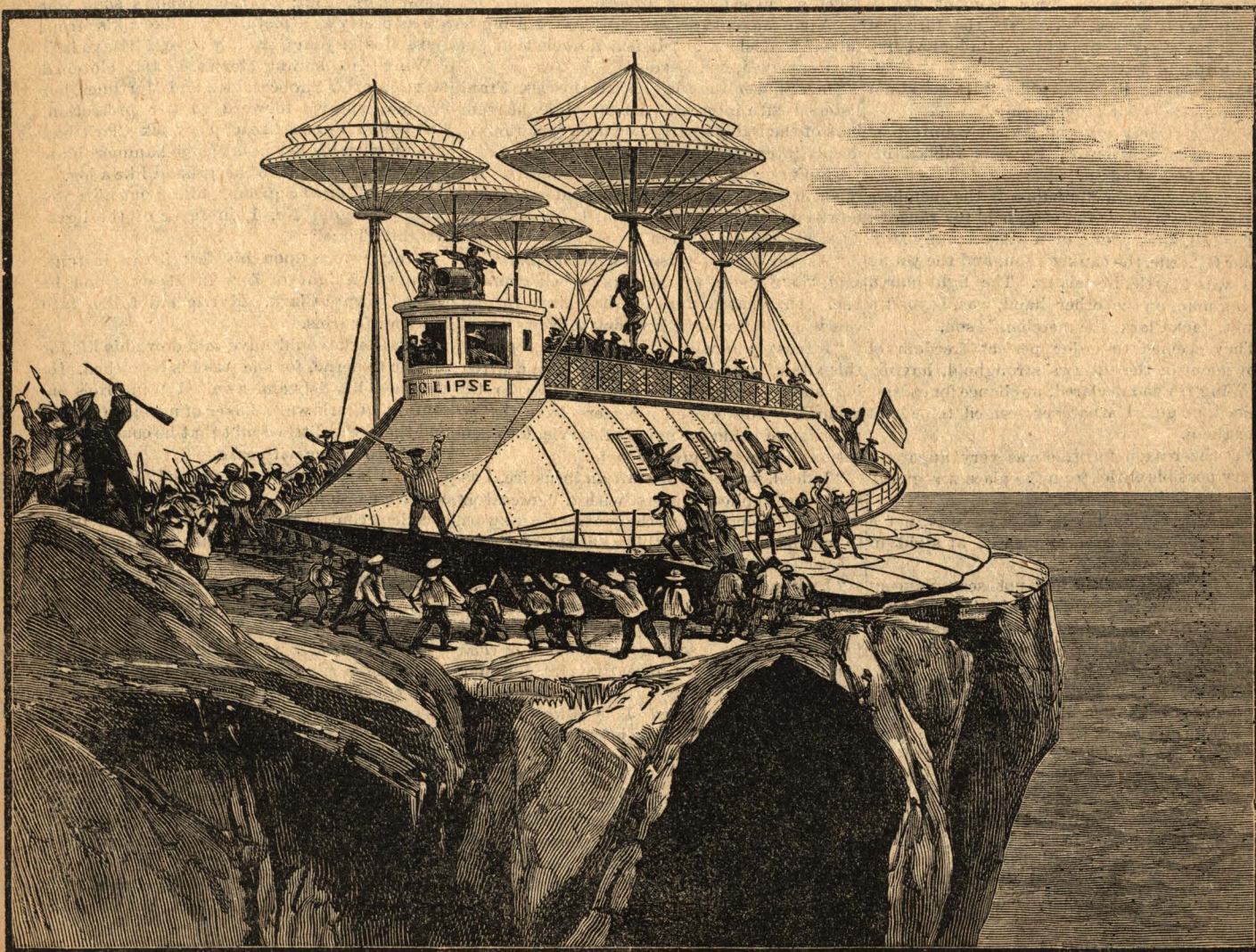
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## Frank Reade, Jr.,

and His New Electric Air-Ship, the "Eclipse;" or,  
**FIGHTING THE CHINESE PIRATES.**

PART II.

BY "NONAME."



Too late our friends saw the treachery of the move. In an instant they were in the grasp of the deadly foe. The pirates overwhelmed them and gained the deck of the air-ship. In a twinkling the voyagers were prisoners and the Eclipse in the possession of Wing Ho and his pirate crew.



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# FRANK READE, JR.,

## And His New Electric Air-Ship, the "Eclipse;"

OR,

## Fighting the Chinese Pirates.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade, Jr., With His Air-Ship In Asia; or, A Flight Across the Steppes," etc.

### PART II.

#### CHAPTER XXVIII.

##### IN THE PIRATES' DEN.

CALEB SQUEERS was for a moment unable to believe his senses. Certainly the foremost one of the party approaching him looked like Frank Reade, Jr.

"Impossible!" he muttered. "He could not be here. He is with the air-ship."

Yet it certainly was the perfect counterpart of the famous inventor. Squeers rubbed his eyes and looked again.

The others were undoubtedly the members of the Daisy's crew who were held for ransom.

The tall, dark young man was certainly Mortimer Osborne, the banker's son, and the young girl was Myrtle, his sister. The light-haired young man, on the other hand, was, beyond a doubt, Jack Clark, the merchant's son.

They seemed to enjoy perfect freedom of movement in the outlaws' stronghold, having, as Wing Ho had declared, no chance for escape. Indeed, no guard whatever seemed to be kept over them.

Yet the reason for this was very apparent. Every possible outlet from the place was guarded by the Chinese guards.

Frank Reade, Jr., for he it was, was not a little surprised as well as pleased at sight of Squeers.

The famous inventor had not seen Squeers since the memorable night of his disappearance from the air-ship. Indeed, as the reader knows, the eccentric reporter of news had been believed dead.

In another moment Caleb had grasped Frank's hand and was shaking it vigorously.

"Upon my soul, I am glad to see you, Squeers!" cried the famous inventor. "Glad to know that you are alive. We had thought you dead."

"Great Jericho!" muttered Squeers, with a prolonged whistle. "It ain't you, Mr. Reade?"

"It is nobody else," replied Frank.

"But," exclaimed the reporter, unable to overcome his amazement, "what on earth are you doing here?"

"I can assure you that I am not here of my own free will," replied Frank, with a laugh.

Then he proceeded to detail the thrilling story of his underground swim. Squeers listened with the deepest interest.

"Your adventures are fully as exciting as mine," he declared. "It is a miracle that you have survived, Mr. Reade."

Then Squeers detailed his adventures. Frank listened with interest. All the while the members of the Daisy's party had been standing by, deeply interested listeners.

Frank now introduced them to Squeers. The reporter shook hands with the young men and bowed gallantly to the young lady. Then he drew his note-book from his pocket.

"As we are all prisoners in this place," he said, "our cause would seem to be a common one. Ah, what material I shall have for stories when I once more get back to New York."

"I trust you will give a truthful report of this affair," said Myrtle Osborne, with a witching smile, which made Squeers bow to the ground. "Newspaper reporters have the reputation of being far more subservient to sensation than actual prosaic facts."

"Indeed, you do our craft an injustice, I assure you," replied Squeers, with a deprecatory gesture. "Reporters, to the contrary, are sworn to tell the truth and nothing but the truth."

Everybody laughed at this.

"I will vouch for Mr. Squeers' veracity," said Frank, with a laugh.

"Well, you people seem to be having a pretty jolly time of it," said a harsh voice in their rear. All turned to face the pirate leader, Wing Ho.

"Why not?" retorted Jack Clark, coolly. "We know that our stay here is only a question of time."

A curious light shone in Wing Ho's eyes.

"I sincerely hope that," he gritted, maliciously. "If that ransom money isn't forthcoming very quick, we'll shorten our expenses by burying you all out there in the bay. Only on payment of ransom can any of you go from here alive."

"Monster!" exclaimed Myrtle, with flashing eyes. "The law should deal with you."

"Law!" exclaimed Wing Ho, with a scornful

laugh. "Precious little law ye'll find in these parts. Wing Ho's word is all the law that's about here. But, by the Mikado's soul! you are as pretty as a picture. I'd like a kiss from those lips of yours, and, by Jove, I'll have it!"

Wing Ho sprang forward and clutched Myrtle's arm. She screamed and Mortimer, her brother, sprang forward to her protection. But before he could reach her Jack Clark had let out with his fist in a sledge-hammer blow and Wing Ho went to the ground like a log.

"Bravo!" cried Squeers, pulling out his note-book. "Round No. 1, in favor of the lightweight. Time!"

Wing Ho was upon his feet in an instant. There was a light of fury in his eyes and he rushed toward Clark. Myrtle had fallen into Mortimer's arms.

Jack Clark would have laid down his life for Myrtle Osborne, for she was his betrothed. He clenched his fists and awaited Wing Ho's oncoming. Clark was a boxer of no mean ability and there was little doubt that he could handle the pirate leader with ease.

But Wing Ho suddenly paused. He quivered with passion, but he seemed to have gained excellent control of himself. He stood for a moment glaring at Clark with deadly hatred. Then he gritted, huskily:

"Curse ye! that will cost ye your life. Tomorrow I will show you what it is to feel the vengeance of Wing Ho."

Then he turned and called to half a score of the Chinese pirates who were by the water. They came up and laying hands upon the prisoners they were marched away.

"Put them into the big chamber," commanded Wing Ho in Chinese. "Place good guards at the door. We'll see if solitude won't fix 'em."

The prisoners were led into a long chamber hollowed out of the rock. Iron doors closed it, and here they were left. Jack Clark yet quivered with rage.

"This is unfortunate," said Mortimer. "It was a noble blow you gave, Jack, but I fear the consequences."

"If I was to die the next moment I would give it over again," cried Clark, resolutely.



"It may cost me my life, but I am not afraid to die. I only wish I had killed the wretch."

"Oh, Jack!" cried Myrtle, as she went to his side, "I fear the villain will do you some deadly harm."

"I will die like a man," declared Clark.

The situation was now a serious one. It was hard to tell what Wing Ho might not conceive in the machinations of his evil nature. It was not impossible that he would order the whole party put to death.

"There is only one observation I have to make," ventured Squeers, in his dry manner, "and that is, that it is highly necessary for us to plan an escape at once."

"We are with you!" cried Mortimer; "but how can it be done?"

"Ah, that is the conundrum," said Jack Clark.

All looked to Frank Reade, Jr. He was a man of superior mental caliber and inventive genius. But Frank was already at work.

He had been examining the walls of the cavern very attentively. He was sufficiently well versed in matters of geological formation to conclude that this cavern had not been made by human hands.

It was certainly the work of nature. Moreover, he was able after a careful examination of the strata of rock to judge how the cavern was formed, that is, to guess fairly at the different processes of nature. As a result he declared to himself with conviction:

"There is no reason to doubt but that this cavern was once the bed or tunnel of a trickling stream of water from the surface above. In that case, communication with the upper surface ought to be easily established unless this tunnel has been wholly stopped up. Perhaps only the mouth of it has stopped up. If so—there is a chance."

All watched him with interest. Carefully Frank traced the action of the water upon the sides of the cavern. In this way he made his way to its farthest depth. And here he made a thrilling discovery.

There was a small orifice between some huge stones and a pile of gravel. By holding a lighted match to this the upward draft was perceived. With his hands he pulled away the gravel and enlarged the aperture. Then with a thrilling whisper he turned to the others and said:

"Friends, escape is possible. This cavern extends I believe into the outer air. If we can enlarge this aperture sufficiently we can find our way out."

But at that moment the iron door of the prison chamber swung back upon its hinges.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### AT THE FORT.

THE Eclipse hung one thousand feet over Fort Kiang Chu in the early morning hours. But the guard at the fort had seen the air-ship, and a drum could be heard calling the men to quarters.

Dr. Vaneyke displayed a white flag over the air-ship's stern to re-assure the inmates of the fort. They made reply to the truce and then the air-ship began to descend.

It was Dr. Vaneyke's idea that some plan of co-operation for an attack on the stronghold of Wing Ho could be made with the garrison of the fort.

Again, if Frank Reade, Jr., had really survived and had made his escape, the doctor believed that his first move would be to seek safe quarters at Kiang Chu. This hope was strong in the scientist's breast.

Will Deane and Sam Hop were at the rail, Dr. Vaneyke was in the bow, and Pomp was at the wheel as the Eclipse descended.

Like a huge bird the air-ship settled down, and finally rested upon the earth at a distance of one hundred yards from the fort and but a few feet from the dense forest.

The gates of the fort opened, and, to the music of Chinese drums, a guard marched out. At their head walked, with stately tread, the commandant of the fort, a tall, heavy-featured Mongolian, wearing a dress richly trimmed and bedecked with gold braid. A long sword, after the Chinese pattern, was stuck in the sash about his waist.

The guard advanced until within twenty-five yards of the air-ship.

Then, drawn up in line, the drums ceased, and a salute was fired. The regiment cheered, and then the commandant advanced and made a low bow, with bared head.

All of the aerial voyagers were now at the rail. Dr. Vaneyke descended the gang ladder and doffed his hat.

Salutations were exchanged in French, which the commandant spoke fluently.

"You can tell me of our noble Prince Kong?" was the first question Gen. Pei Ho asked. "He has been with you in your wonderful flying sampan."

"I can," replied Dr. Vaneyke. "And I am sorry to inform you that I fear he is dead."

The commandant fell upon his face and muttered an incantation in Chinese. When he arose, he continued:

"The empire of China will mourn for Prince Kong. Saw you his dead body?"

With this Dr. Vaneyke related all the experiences through which the Eclipse had passed since leaving the fort. Gen. Pei Ho listened with the deepest interest. Then a light broke across his yellow face.

"Ah!" he cried, "but we do not know that the prince is dead. We will not think that Joss has taken him away yet."

"It is well to cling to hope," agreed Dr. Vaneyke. "But I fear we shall never see either of them in life again."

"But the wretch, Wing Ho? Have you not destroyed his stronghold yet?"

"We have not yet found it," replied Dr. Vaneyke. "We hardly know how to act without Frank Reade, Jr. We wish to avenge his death if it may be that he is dead, and we want your co-operation to vanquish Wing Ho."

"Which you shall have!" cried the Chinese commandant, readily. "We will act in conjunction with your flying ship, M. American."

"That is what we want," declared Dr. Vaneyke. "If you can send a force of men to the underground river with boats we will accompany them with the air-ship, and will protect them with our electric bombs."

"I will gladly do that," replied the Mongolian general. "Will two hundred men be enough, think you?"

"I have no doubt of it," replied the doctor. "They will run little risk for the air-ship will protect them."

"Will not monsieur accept of my hospitality in the fort?" said Gen. Pei Ho, bowing low, and using excellent French. "I have some very fine wine, which no doubt monsieur will enjoy."

"I thank you," replied the doctor, politely. "At some other time I will accept your offer. At present I seek only to wind up matters with Wing Ho."

The commandant bowed low.

"It shall be as monsieur says," he replied.

"Can you have your men ready immediately?" asked the doctor.

"I can," replied Pei Ho. But he did not further. At that instant a tragic series of accidents were inaugurated.

From the woods back of the air-ship there suddenly came a wild, hoarse medley of yells. All of the crew of the air-ship were at the rail with Dr. Vaneyke.

Instantly they turned to be confronted with an awful peril.

From the woods there came a line of pirates, armed to the teeth. They reached the rail of the air-ship and came aboard in a twinkling.

Surging over the rail by dozens the air-ship was almost instantly at the mercy of the fiends.

Dr. Vaneyke and Will Deane raised their rifles and fired. Sam Hop did the same but Pomp was quick witted enough to dodge into the pilot-house.

In an instant he had shut the steel door and charged it. He could have turned the lever and sent the Eclipse aloft but he saw at a glance that this would be a fatal move.

Fully fifty of the foe had gained the deck of the Eclipse and Dr. Vaneyke, Will Deane and Sam Hop were swept back before them.

Indeed in the open, and unprotected as they were, they were obliged to desert the deck and retreat to the fort under cover of a fire from the squad brought out by Pei Ho.

It was a catastrophe of the most serious kind. The air-ship was practically in the possession of the pirates.

The main body massed themselves behind the air-ship, using it as a breastwork and exchanged volleys with the soldiers in the fort.

The heavy cannon on the ramparts would have quickly dispersed the foe but these could not be used for fear of harm to the Eclipse.

In a twinkling the pirates invaded the engine-room and cabin. Pomp had just time to close the steel door connecting the engine-room with the pilot-house.

In view of just such an exigency as this, these had been connected with the dynamos, so that by pressing a key they could be heavily charged.

Pomp was seemingly in a dangerous position in the pilot-house. Really, he was quite secure.

The first to essay the bursting in of the pilot-house door quickly repented of his bargain.

He was picked up like a feather and hurled a dozen feet away. Several of the barbarians experienced this sort of thing before becoming satisfied.

They made vain attempts to get at Pomp, who remained securely behind the steel, bullet-proof screen of the pilot-house.

"Jes' yo' try fo' to git in yar if yo' kin!" cried Pomp, making hideous faces at the foe. "Yah, yah, you's no good set, yo' yaller-skinned monkeys."

Then Pomp opened fire on them at short range through a loop-hole. The darky soon had one section of the deck at least wholly at his mercy, the foe retreating out of range in dismay.

While those in the fort kept up a rapid fusillade, a large sized battle was quickly in progress.

The pirates were undoubtedly a detachment sent by Wing Ho to attack the fort. They had crept up so silently that it had not been a difficult matter to surprise the defenders of the air-ship.

The desultory battle went on. The pirates



locked the cabin; but fortunately the forward part of the air-ship was locked, and they secured nothing of great value.

But there was a great chance that they might do much damage in the engine-room. Pomp knew this and was greatly alarmed.

The delicate machinery of the Eclipse could be quickly ruined by the vandals. Pomp was practically powerless to avoid this calamity.

He heard them descend into the engine-room. The darky was trying in vain to think of some scheme of circumventing them, when a tremendous explosion rent the air and shook the air-ship from stem to stern.

### CHAPTER XXX.

#### OUTWITTING THE FOE.

For an instant Pomp feared that the air-ship was blown up. He rushed with chattering teeth to the window in the pilot-house.

The explosion had given the air-ship a violent rocking. Indeed, things were all thrown about on the deck and Pomp beheld a startling sight.

The ground between the air-ship and the wood was deeply furrowed and mangled bodies were strewn about.

The truth was one of the pirates had confiscated a spare bomb which had been left on the air-ship's deck.

He had attempted to carry it away not knowing what was its nature, and had got but a few yards from the air-ship when he accidentally dropped it.

That was the termination of the career of that unfortunate Chinaman.

It would have been difficult to find enough of his body to make a funeral. Moreover, several others of the pirate crew were killed.

With this crash all of the pirates in the engine-room had rushed upon the deck.

For the moment the machinery was safe. But that they would return to the engine-room was certain.

Realizing this, Pomp adopted a daring trick. He opened the steel door leading into the engine-room.

At the moment the engine-room was deserted.

With a quick spring, the brave darky sprang up the stairs. For one swift instant he was exposed to the fire of the foe.

But, fortunately, they did not see him in time. The next moment Pomp drew the sliding hatch and covered the companionway. It was but a moment's work to fasten it.

Then down into the engine-room sprang that delighted darky.

"Golly! I'll jes' gib dem vilyuns a good lesson," he chuckled. "I'll jes' larn dem not to play wif de Eclipse any mo'."

Pomp now had command of the dynamos and all of the electric wires and switches.

It was but a moment's work for him to connect a wire with the steel hull of the air-ship. This was so arranged, with a series of non-conductors, that it could be heavily charged, and only that part of the ship would be susceptible to the mighty current. This was a device which Frank had conceived in case of an attack at close quarters.

Pomp quickly connected the wires with the dynamos and then turned on the current. A number of the pirates were just climbing aboard, when, coming in contact with the electrified hull, they were hurled back with stunning force.

Indeed, not one of them could climb aboard the air-ship.

Those on deck, amazed, hastened to the rail. Three of them came in contact with the

charged part and they were knocked off the deck in a flash.

Alarmed, those on deck began to beat a retreat. But as quickly as they went to clamber over the rail, they were shocked nearly into insensibility.

This was something which their ignorant natures could not understand. Numberless were the victims of the mysterious and invisible force.

Maddened by this result, the pirates set up a yell of rage and began to throw missiles at the Eclipse.

This was the danger that Pomp had feared, but he was equal to the emergency.

It was but a moment's work for him to turn Lever No. 7, and the rotascopes began to move.

A wild cheer went up from the fort as it was seen there how cleverly Pomp had circumvented the pirates. Dr. Vaneyke in particular was beside himself with joy.

Up went the Eclipse, and when fifty feet from the earth, Pomp adjusted the lever to hold the ship stationary, and seizing some bombs he rushed out on deck.

The pirates in dismay had retreated to the cover of the trees. The plucky darky then rushed to the rail.

Down went one of the bombs. It burst with a terrific report in the verge of the forest. The effect was fearful.

Trees were shattered, the earth plowed up and the pirates were many of them killed and wounded.

In dismay and terror the survivors broke ranks and incontinently fled into the woods. They were in great numbers and Pomp saw at once that it would be useless to attempt to annihilate the whole of them.

In the first place he had not bombs enough, and again it would be a murderous sacrifice of human life. So he was content with simply putting the enemy to rout.

Meanwhile, the defenders of the fort had mounted the breastworks and were cheering the plucky darky roundly.

"Golly! I spec's them rapskallions know better dan to fool wif dis air-ship ag'in," he chuckled with great relish. "Dat am a bigger slice dey bit off dan dey could swallow, I jes' fink."

It was a certain fact that the foe had been put to flight. Pomp made sure of this, then he caused the air-ship to descend.

But he was too prudent to allow it to alight in the same spot.

There was an open space in the fort inclosure of sufficient size, and upon this the Eclipse alighted.

As the ship touched the ground, Dr. Vaneyke and Will Deane rushed aboard. The doctor nearly embraced Pomp in the exuberance of his feelings.

"Upon my soul, Pomp!" he cried, enthusiastically, "you are the certain means of saving the air-ship from destruction."

"I done fink dat am so," agreed Pomp, without egotism. "I jes' reckon if Marse Frank had been yer, he wudn't hab done nuffin' diffrunt, nohow."

"Nobody could have done better!" cried Dr. Vaneyke, fulsomely. "You are a hero, Pomp. You have saved us all."

"That is so," agreed Will Deane.

"Darky man, he heap big stuff," put in Sam Hop. "Fightee pilate allee samee Melican man."

Indeed, Pomp was thus suddenly made a real hero in the eyes of all. The darky was more

than pleased, and would gladly have accepted the same peril again for sake of the praise.

But further conversation on the subject was cut short by a warning cry from the breastworks.

This was followed by the crash of fire-arms. To the surprise of our adventurers, it was seen that the foe had returned to the attack with redoubled fury.

It was plain that the pirates were meaning to capture the fort, if such a thing was possible.

They had come out of the woods again in a solid line, and advanced with great resolution upon the double-quick. The Chinese soldiers had barely time to meet the attack.

"Upon my word!" cried Dr. Vaneyke, in amazement; "those villains show good pluck in face of the treatment you gave them, Pomp."

"Golly sakes! I jes' fink dat same fing m'sef, Marse Vaneyke," cried Pomp. "It am jes' propah to give dem some mo' ob de same sort."

"You are right!" cried the doctor, as he sprang toward the air-ship. "It is well to beat them off before they actually carry the breastworks. They are in great numbers."

"A'right, Marse Vaneyke!" cried Pomp, clearing the rail and rushing into the pilot-house.

Will Deane and Sam Hop followed. The fight at the breastworks now was a vigorous and fierce one.

Pomp turned Lever No. 7 and the air-ship sprang up into the air. Dr. Vaneyke was at the rail with some of the electric bombs, ready to throw down upon the heads of the enemy.

But just as he was about to drop one of them, Will Deane clutched his arm with a startled cry.

"Look!" he cried. "Do you see that?"

Dr. Vaneyke looked in the direction indicated and he gave a mighty start. He stood for a moment like one petrified, and then turned to shout to Pomp:

"Set the propellers going, Pomp! Steer due east! Lively as you can!"

The sight beheld by both the doctor and Will Deane was a thrilling one.

### CHAPTER XXXI.

#### A DESPERATE COUP-DE-MAIN.

WITH the sudden opening of the door of their prison-chamber, our adventurers in Wing Ho's stronghold believed themselves discovered in the act of escape.

Only quick wit and action upon the part of Frank Reade at that moment saved the day.

In an instant he was upon his feet, standing in such a way as to conceal the aperture, while he had time to whisper:

"Look sharp, all. Don't betray yourselves. Act unconcerned and easy."

The cue, briefly as it was given was taken, and all turned with a careless and indifferent air. Mortimer and Jack Clark started forward.

The person to enter was not Wing Ho, however, but one of the guards. He was a dull, stupid fellow, and did not notice anything peculiar in the attitude of the prisoners.

He simply gave them a cursory glance and picked up the tray of miserably cooked food from the floor. With this upon his head he made his exit.

All drew a breath of relief when he had gone. It was a narrow escape and there was reason for congratulation.

"By Jove, that was a close call!" declared



Jack Clark, as he went to the door and peered out through the grating.

He could see nothing of any of the pirates, and communicated this fact to the others by signs.

At once Frank Reade went back to his work of enlarging the aperture which was to furnish them a means of escape.

As the famous inventor worked he became satisfied that they had really found an avenue of escape. He discovered a large passage trending upward and through which a man's body could easily pass.

Making this investigation, he turned to the others and said:

"I believe we are sure to escape."

"You don't mean it?" cried Mortimer Osborne, excitedly.

"The gods are with us!" cried Jack Clark. "I feel sure of that."

As for Caleb Squeers, out came his note-book and he began to draw the outlines of an interesting story.

"The Daily Newsgatherer will pay a fabulous price for this," he muttered, jubilantly. "I shall come out top of the heap yet. Won't my brother reporters in Gotham be jealous when I return covered with glory and wealth!"

As for Myrtle, she was quite pale and calm, and her lips moved in an inaudible prayer. To her the danger had only just begun.

Frank Reade had enlarged the hole large enough to enable a man's body to pass through safely. Escape seemed certain.

But at this moment a dismayed cry came from Jack Clark at the door.

"Take care!" he cried, in a low tone. "Be on your guard!"

"What is it?" cried Frank Reade, Jr., apprehensively.

"Wing Ho himself, with three guards behind him, is coming. What shall we do?"

"Lost!" groaned Squeers, dismally.

"No!" cried Mortimer Osborne, excitedly. "We can escape yet. Barricade the door and come on. If we can get out of the cave before they get in, we shall be all right."

"No!" interposed Frank Reade, Jr., authoritatively. "That will not be possible. Any such attempt is ill-advised."

"What shall we do then?" asked Mortimer, impatiently. "If he comes in upon us in this manner, he will discover our attempt at escape and all will be up."

"It is our only chance," decided Frank Reade. "We must trust to fate."

As the famous inventor spoke decisively, nobody ventured to gainsay him, and the matter dropped. But all stood upon their guard, and when the door suddenly opened and Wing Ho stood upon the threshold, all were unconcerned and quite self-possessed.

The pirate leader gave the prisoners a critical glance, and then a hideous grin contracted his features.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, in a grating voice. "You all look quite reconciled to your fate. If you knew what was in store you might look different, I may venture."

"You can have no fate in store for us which we are not prepared to meet bravely," said Frank Reade, Jr., sternly.

"Ah, so I should judge. As independent as ever, ain't ye! Ah, well, I'll take that out of ye to-morrow. I'll promise that."

Nobody ventured a reply to this remark. For a full minute nothing more was said. Wing Ho seemed to be deliberating. The three guards stood respectfully at his back.

"Ye shall all die!" he gritted, finally, "all

but the gal. I'm goin' to put her in my harem. To the victor belongs the spoils, ye know. Ah, ye're a beauty, ain't ye, my little spitfire. Upon my word, you grow prettier every day."

The villain advanced toward Myrtle. The young girl shrank back in terror, and with a stride Jack Clark stood between them. The young lover's hands were clenched and lightning leaped from his eyes.

"Don't dare to insult this young lady," he said, sternly. "If you lay a hand on her it will be the worse for you."

Wing Ho's face was livid with wrath.

"Oho!" he gritted. "I can see how it is. You are the lover, eh, and I'm treading on your corns. Well, I'll tread on them with a vengeance."

He turned to the three guards and addressed them in Chinese. In an instant like wolves they threw themselves upon Jack Clark.

The young American was crushed beneath that attack to the cavern floor. But Mortimer Osborne came to his rescue, and seizing one of the guards, hurled him against the cavern wall with such force as to render him insensible.

A second was struck senseless by Frank Reade with a well directed blow from a heavy stone. The third, Jack Clark hurled aside like a puppet and regained his feet.

This lively little scrimmage was in process of execution but a very few moments. Wing Ho was so utterly dumfounded that he could not make action until it was all over.

Then his fury knew no bounds. His villainous face was black with wrath, and he fairly shrieked:

"What ho! help! guards! by the Great Dragon I'll have ye all drawn and quartered for this, this very moment."

But it chanced that none of the pirates were within hearing. A daring resolve seized Frank Reade, Jr.

The famous inventor had no doubt but that the villain would carry out his fierce threats, and knew that all would be up unless a desperate move was made.

He sprang forward crying:

"Seize the monster, boys! Down with the pirate assassin. Kill him and rid the world of a fiend."

Could Frank have had the use of a weapon at that moment he would surely have ended the life of Wing Ho. He would not have hesitated a moment through any compunctions of conscience, for it could scarcely be called a murder.

But unfortunately the great inventor had nothing but his fists, though Jack Clark had deprived one of the insensible guards of his long sword.

The third guard had incontinently fled through the door into the outer cavern and now Wing Ho, seeing that the odds were against him, like the coward that he was, did the same, all the while shrieking for help.

Instantly Jack Clark rushed to the door and shut it. Quickly he placed a barricade against it.

In the meantime, Caleb Squeers had bound the two insensible pirates hand and foot. Mortimer was engaged in assisting Myrtle through the aperture into the inner cavern.

There was not an instant's time to be lost. It was a most daring *coup-de-main* and its success depended wholly upon quick and prompt action.

Mortimer and Myrtle had already gone into the inner cavern. Jack Clark and Caleb motioned to Frank Reade to do the same.

"No," replied the famous inventor, decidedly, "I am the last."

At that instant the yells of the pirates were heard outside, and a horde of them threw their weight upon the door. It seemed to be bursting in.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE AIR-SHIP ONCE MORE.

THERE was not an instant's time to lose. For a moment it did not seem possible for the three remaining ones of the party to escape.

Squeers was the first to pass through into the outer cavern. Jack Clark followed him and Frank Reade, Jr., was last.

Myrtle and her brother were far advanced up the steep passage-way. In a short while a gleam of light was seen ahead.

The three men in the rear now came panting and puffing up. As Myrtle's strength had given out Jack Clark and Squeers together carried her.

"Do you think it possible for us to escape, Mr. Reade?" asked Mortimer, breathlessly.

"We must," declared Frank, determinedly.

Upward they still struggled. The gleam of light grew stronger every moment. They were nearing the outer world.

Indistinct sounds were heard below. Frank Reade was in the rear and he knew that these were made by the pirates in close pursuit.

Would they never reach the upper world? It seemed slow, toilsome progress. Myrtle was an incumbrance and the party was much delayed by her fainting spell.

Every moment the sounds in the rear became more distinct.

"Hurry up, friends!" cried Frank. "We must make double effort."

Mortimer and Frank now relieved Jack Clark and Caleb and with increased speed the party pressed on.

Every moment they drew nearer the light of day. Soon the passage broadened a trifle and then with an extra effort they emerged into the open air.

They were upon a high bluff overlooking the sea. A fringe of trees protected them from the observation of anybody on board the junks in the cove below.

All were completely exhausted by their rapid climb. Jack Clark and Frank Reade, Jr., sank panting upon the ground.

They could not have gone on at that moment had the world depended upon it.

Yet Frank knew that the peril which overshadowed them was deadly. The pirates were coming up the passage. In a few minutes they would be in the outer air.

It seemed again as if the daring attempt at escape was about to fail.

If Wing Ho and his minions should reach the outer air, it would be almost a certainty that the prisoners would be recaptured. It was a most disheartening reflection.

But Frank Reade was desperate.

It must not—it should not happen, and in that instant a daring plan came to him. Near to the mouth of the passage there were quite a number of tremendous boulders.

Why not roll these down into the passage and block it up? They could never be removed by Wing Ho's men, and would present an effectual barricade to the foe.

No sooner had the idea occurred to Frank than he hastened to carry it into execution. A few words sufficed to acquaint the others with the design.

With a cheer all joined Frank in the daring plan. With their combined strength the



riders were easily dislodged, and tilted over to the mouth of the passage. There was sufficient descent so that they were propelled of themselves, and after reaching a narrow part of the passage there they lodged tons in weight.

One after another of these was tilted over into the passage until it was completely blocked up, not the smallest kind of an aperture being left.

Then the escaped prisoners sent up a rousing cheer. The foe were defeated and they were safe.

What the sensations of Wing Ho were when he found the passage blocked they could but imagine. But they were by no means entirely out of peril.

Finding it impossible to get through the passage, Wing Ho would undoubtedly go back to the main cabin and send a searching party over the cliff.

Knowing this, Frank Reade made no delay. A consultation was held, and it was decided to push forward as far as Fort Kiang Chu.

There they might find asylum at least until some news of the air-ship was learned.

Frank set the course as near right as he could guess, and the start was made.

It was a laborious journey of many miles. When nightfall came all were much exhausted, particularly Myrtle, and they were glad to throw themselves upon the ground and sleep until daybreak.

With the dawn of another day they were once more on the move. For hours they kept on tirelessly.

The afternoon was wearing rapidly away, when peculiar sounds were heard in the distance. It sounded like intermittent peals of thunder, so peculiar was the state of the atmosphere.

But Jack Clark climbed a tree. When he had reached a good height a wild cry broke from his lips.

"There is the fort," he cried, "not more than five miles to the eastward. I can see dimly a host of men upon the plain in front of it. It looks to me as if a battle was going on there."

With renewed spirits, all pressed on again rapidly. One mile more and the firing was easily heard. Still another mile was covered.

But at the end of another mile, Frank called a halt.

"It is necessary now to proceed with great caution," he declared. "It is evident that the foe have attacked the fort, and must be in force very near us. If we are not careful, we shall stumble upon them."

All agreed that this was true, and once more they pressed on, with redoubled speed, but greater caution.

The firing soon sounded quite near, and it was evident that they were in close proximity to the fort, which could not be seen for the belt of trees.

In an open space in the forest Frank Reade, Jr., had called a halt, when a wild and thrilling cry broke from Caleb Squeers:

"The air-ship!" he cried. "Thank God! we are saved!"

All instantly glanced upward, thrilled by the exclamation. Sure enough, floating tranquilly several hundred feet above, was the Eclipse.

A wild shout went up from the throats of all. But they had been seen even before Squeers had caught sight of the air-ship.

Just as Dr. Vaneyke had been about to launch an electric bomb down among the pirates, Pomp had called his attention with a

wild cry to the wanderers. The effect was magical.

Pomp cut a pigeon-wing on the deck. Will Deane whistled gaily. Sam Hop began a Chinese song, and Dr. Vaneyke leaned over the rail and waved his arms in frantic joy.

"Go to the pilot-house, Pomp. Let the Eclipse go down so as to let them on board. I say, Mr. Deane, are not those your friends with Frank?"

"Every one of them!" cried Deane, joyfully, "safe and well. Oh! it is wonderful."

Down went the Eclipse. Resting finally upon the ground, the escaped prisoners of Wing Ho rushed aboard, and excited explanations followed. The meeting between Will Deane and the other members of the Daisy's crew were affecting.

"Bress de Lor! Marse Frank, dis nig jes' reckoned yo' was alibe an' would turn up yit," cried Pomp, joyfully.

"You hit it right," replied Frank. "But where is Barney?"

Dr. Vaneyke hastened to relate the mysterious fate of Barney and Prince Kong. The young inventor listened with horror.

"They must be rescued before we go a step further!" he cried, excitedly. "All the members of the Daisy's party may remain here safely at the fort while we must go on and rescue Barney and the prince."

"Your orders shall be obeyed!" declared Dr. Vaneyke. "But—"

The savant had not time to finish the sentence. A rattling volley of rifle balls came from the woods near, followed by a chorus of wild yells.

All were standing upon the air-ship's deck at the moment, and three of the party fell, struck with the bullets.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### IN DURANCE VILE.

BUT we must now return to Barney and Prince Kong, both of whom, as we have seen in a previous chapter, were attacked by mysterious assailants while getting water for the storage jars of the Eclipse.

So sudden was the attack and withal so unexpected, that neither had a chance to defend himself or even offer the slightest resistance.

Brawny arms were thrown about them and in a twinkling they were disarmed and carried bodily away into the gloom.

Bandages were placed over their faces so that they could not very well see where they were going. In this manner they were carried for a long distance.

From the hollow sound of their footsteps Barney divined that they were traversing some underground passage. This premise proved correct later.

Not one hundred yards from the position of the Eclipse there was a secret cavern, which was blocked by a huge movable boulder.

When the boulder was in place so cleverly was the mouth of the cave concealed that the sharpest eye would have been deceived.

But passing behind the boulder one would enter a long, underground passage, trending slightly upward.

After a long tramp through this passage, all the while climbing upward, the party suddenly came out again into the open air.

High walls of rock, many hundreds of feet high, hemmed in a little green valley. It was nothing more nor less than an extinct crater, and with an area of something more than an acre.

Entrance could not be gained otherwise than

by the passage, or, at least, except by under ground, for there were several underground means of exit and entrance to this admirable retreat.

For the enlightenment of the reader it may be well to explain that this was the retreat of Li Ching, one of the most daring Chinese brigands of the Crystal Mountain.

Here the adroit Li Ching had his headquarters, and sallied forth to waylay unsuspecting travelers, or even the Emperor's miners, many a sacred crystal finding its way into his hands.

Li Ching was credited with being a merciless and uncompromising villain. His deeds of crime were embraced in a mighty category, and a large price had been offered by the Emperor for his head.

But the Chinese robber defied the Imperial Government, and maintained his robber pursuits without stint and restraint.

When the bandages were removed from Barney's and Prince Kong's eyes they saw a motley and villainous crowd of masked Celestials standing about them.

The walls of the small valley rose grim and forbidding to the height of many feet. Near by torches were stuck in crevices and lit up the vicinity dimly.

One of the villains, who seemed to be the leader, and who was in reality Li Ching, advanced and confronted the prisoners.

"Who are you?" he asked Prince Kong in the Chinese language.

The prince drew himself up with a commanding air of dignity. With withering force he replied:

"I am one to whom you should do homage. It is the price of your worthless necks to thus insult me. I am Kong, the son of your Emperor. I demand that you at once set me at liberty, or you shall die!"

Even Li Ching himself winced at these brave words. But the villain's hardihood quickly returned.

A mocking laugh of triumph escaped his lips, and he replied jeeringly:

"What a prize we have bagged. So you are the son of the Emperor, eh? So you are Prince Kong? By the Sacred Dragon, you shall be well paid for or you will never go from here alive. Half the Imperial Government's exchequer alone will set you free, my noble prince."

"Hound!" shrieked Prince Kong, angrily. "How dare you treat one of the royal family in this way? Why, you shall be cut limb from limb to pay for this. I demand that you set us free."

"Easy, prince," replied Li Ching, coolly. "You cannot afford to dare me too far. I hold your life in my hands."

"A prince of the royal family, a lineal descendant of Confucius is not afraid to die," retorted the prince, bravely.

But Li Ching turned away, giving a few low-toned orders to his men.

"P'what the devil does the squint-eyed sardine say?" asked Barney of Prince Kong, for the Hibernian had not understood a word of the conversation.

"We are in a very bad box," replied the prince in English. "I hardly know what we shall do. We shall plan an escape in some way. You have fertile ideas, Barney."

"Begorra, I don't know phwere the devil we are," replied the Celt, in utter amazement. "It lukes to me loike the cinter av the airth or the middle av ther moon."

"We are in an extinct crater, of which this mountain has several," replied Prince Kong.



"There are several passages leading from here, as I have been informed. This mountain is honeycombed, and that is the reason why it is almost next to impossible to hunt out the robbers who seek a hiding-place here."

"Bejabers, if that's the case," said Barney, confidently, "we'll not be shmart but we'll find some way av crawling out av the place unbeknownst to ther skulkin' devils."

Before Prince Kong could make reply one of the outlaws advanced and led the prisoners into a cavern near the passage by which they had entered.

This cavern seemed to come to an end ten feet beyond its entrance. Some rugs were thrown down for the prisoners to sleep on, and a guard placed before the entrance to the place.

Both prisoners sat down on the rugs. The situation was a dreary one.

"I don't see howiver our frinds will foind us here," reflected Barney, after some moments of silence. "Be me sowl, I belave we're in a bad box, Misther Kong."

"There is one consolation," declared the prince, "they will not be apt to kill us until well satisfied that they can get no ransom. In the meanwhile, we can plan for an escape. If we fail, we can no more than die."

"That's thrue enough," replied Barney. "Phwat do yez think av a plan to escape? I can't think av a bloody wan."

"First of all let us examine every inch of this cavern," declared the prince. "There may be some way of getting into another cavern and of making an escape in that manner."

It was so dark in the cavern that the guard outside could not see what the prisoners were about.

Prince Kong and Barney, on their hands and knees, made an exploring tour of the cave. But search as they might, they could find no crevice or any suggestion that the cave might lead into another.

After a time they were compelled to desist. Both were extremely worn out, and sinking down upon the pile of rugs, they were soon fast asleep.

When morning came they were brought food by one of the guards. This consisted of plain rice with a couple of chopsticks to eat with.

Both were hungry and the rice was cooling and refreshing to the palate. After the meal they felt refreshed.

But that day passed and another night. Then in the latter part of the second day Li Ching appeared with a file of armed men.

In the Chinese language he gave them sharp commands, and Barney was led out into the open crater. Straight to a high rock he was led, and stood up with his back to it.

Then the guard marched back twenty yards and stood in line with their guns at their shoulders. Li Ching himself stood at the end of the line.

Barney's blood nigh congealed with horror as he comprehended the situation.

It was evidently the purpose of the ruffian, Li Ching, to summarily execute him in this horrible manner. The brute stood at the end of the line with the word of command upon his lips.

It looked certainly as if that was certain to be poor Barney O'Shea's last moment on earth.

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

##### SAM HOP PLAYS WATCH.

THE dastardly volley fired from the woods had stricken down three of the party upon the deck of the Eclipse.

These were Will Deane, Mortimer Osborne

and Caleb Squeers. The latter, however, was instantly upon his feet, and stripping up his pantaloons leg, showed where a bullet had glanced along the shinbone.

It was only a trifling scratch, yet the shock had knocked him down.

The others, however, did not escape so easily. Will Deane suffered from a wound upon the head, which had resulted in a simple concussion but none the less painful.

Mortimer Osborne had been shot through the calf of the leg. It was a flesh wound, and not fatal, but would necessitate careful treatment just the same.

Frank Reade, Jr., and Dr. Vaneyke, with Jack Clark, had sprung to the aid of the wounded ones.

But Pomp in an instant was in the pilot-house. He opened lever No. 7 wide, and the air-ship sprang into space.

Up went the Eclipse two hundred feet in the air. There Pomp held the air-ship suspended.

Caleb Squeers was practically as well as ever after applying a bit of plaster to the wound upon his leg. Will Deane quickly recovered, but Mortimer was removed to the cabin where Myrtle remained with him, while Dr. Vaneyke dressed the wound skillfully.

While he was doing this those on deck were engaged in teaching the pirates a lesson.

Frank ordered the Eclipse down one hundred feet lower and then began to throw the electric bombs. The result was terrific.

The foe were scattered like sheep and fled, leaving scores of dead and wounded behind. When the rest of them in the woods had been thoroughly cleaned out Frank turned his attention to the fort.

The conflict there had been a bitter one. The pirates seeing that the air-ship had for a time disappeared, tried to take advantage of the opportunity to carry the fort.

It was not unlikely that they might have succeeded, being in great numbers and fighting desperately. But the air-ship suddenly returned to the scene of the action.

The result was by no means favorable to the pirates. The first bomb thrown made a gap in their ranks. Three more drove the advance guard back in confusion from the palisade.

Those mighty thunderbolts, dropping from the clouds, carried a sum total of destruction with them, which was beyond human power to withstand. The pirate force broke rank and began a disorderly retreat.

And right into their midst were hurled those fearful destroyers akin to the bolts of Jove. In five minutes not a pirate, other than the dead and wounded, was within three hundred yards of the palisade.

The repulse was signal and effectual. The pirates were dispersed over a large tract of country, and satisfied with the punishment he had given them, Frank Reade, Jr., directed that the air-ship should return to the fort.

The Eclipse once more settled down upon the plain before Kiang Chu. The Chinese soldiers came out on dress parade and cheered like veterans as the crew of the air-ship alighted.

Through Sam Hop as interpreter Frank told the garrison that their prince was in the hands of the enemy, and that he was about to set forth upon a trip of rescue.

Arrangements were easily made for the stay of the Daisy's crew at the fort until the return of the air-ship.

"When I return," said Frank to Will Deane, "I will undertake to carry you to Hong Kong and place you safely aboard a U. S. man-of-war. Then my mission will be consummated,

but I cannot think of returning home and leaving Barney here in the power of the foe."

"Of course not, Mr. Reade," replied Will Deane, with deep fervor. "We owe much to you for your kind services thus far. But for you and your wonderful air-ship none of us would have lived to leave China."

Then the arrangements were made. The crew of the air-ship now consisted, besides Frank himself, of Pomp and Dr. Vaneyke, Caleb Squeers and Sam Hop. All were determined to find Barney and Prince Kong alive, if within human power, and to rescue them.

As darkness was at hand, nothing could really be gained by starting that night.

Moreover, the storage jars had only been half filled at the last stopping place, by the lake at the foot of the Crystal Mountain. It would be as good an opportunity as could be gained to attend to this, and also the oiling of the machinery.

So Frank decided to rest for the night under cover of the fort. Accordingly things were made ship-shape for the night, and all retired to rest.

It was Pomp's watch the latter half of the night, and as Barney, of course, was not on hand to take his turn, Frank decided to appoint Sam Hop to watch the first half of the night.

The Chinaman was quite inflated with the prospect of being given such a responsibility. He shouldered his gun and paraded the deck pompously.

"Me watchee allee light," he declared, confidently. "Likee allee samee blackee man. Sam Hop no 'fraid, fightee pilate, heap kill."

"All right, Sam," said Frank, re-assuringly. "If you see or hear anything wrong, just touch that little button by the cabin door. It will ring an electric bell in my state-room and we will be able to give the foe a hot reception."

"Allee light!" replied Sam, earnestly. "Me do it likee tellee. No fail."

An hour later all had retired to rest. Darkness settled down thickly over the country. Sam patrolled the deck faithfully and keenly enjoying the task.

It yet lacked an hour of midnight. At just that hour he had received orders to call Pomp, who would take the latter half of the watch. But the kind-hearted Chinaman had decided upon a plan of his own.

"Blackee man he tired," he averred, confidently. "Sam watchee allee night—let blackee man sleep. Sam no tired. Heap likee keep watch. All sleep. Sam watchee allee time."

So the Chinaman paced up and down the deck until long past the midnight hour, and Pomp continued to sleep the sleep of the just. No doubt Sam Hop's intentions were of the kindest, but the result was not a pleasant one.

The good-humored Chinaman paraded the air-ship's deck. He began at the bow and walked clear round the ship, following the rail all the way until he had again arrived at the bow. By so doing, part of the time his view was obstructed upon one side by the hull of the ship.

This gave a watching foe an admirable chance to creep up and seek shelter in the shadows, just under the hull of the Eclipse. And unseen by Sam, dark forms slipped from the cover of the thick woods and ensconced themselves in these shadows.

The pirates were far from disconcerted by their defeat of the day before. They had even dared to concoct a plan to surprise and capture the air-ship by night.

A large number of them had been concealed



the woods near. It was easy enough for him to see Sam Hop parading the deck, and they had but to watch their opportunity to creep up and secrete themselves in the shadows.

Unsuspectingly Sam continued to keep his route around the Eclipse's deck. Thus far he had seen nothing to excite his suspicions, and was not dreaming of danger when suddenly two panther-like forms came gliding over the rail in his rear, in an instant they were upon him, and, before he could make an outcry, his gun was snatched from him and rough hands were pressed over his mouth.

In the twinkling of an eye he was a helpless prisoner.

A gag was thrust into his mouth, and his arms and legs were bound. Then he was left helpless in this position, while the foe swarmed noiselessly over the rail and filled the deck room.

Several of them crept into the cabin. Frank Reade, Jr.'s state-room door was open, and the young inventor could be seen lying upon a richly-furnished couch.

His breast was bared, and his head thrown back. It was a tempting target. The pirates whispered a moment, then one of them with a long, terrible-looking knife in his hand started to enter the state-room. If he reached Frank's side death would be the portion of the famous inventor.

#### CHAPTER XXXV.

##### BARNEY'S SHARP DODGE.

LI CHING's file of bandits stood in line with rifles aimed at Barney, waiting for the word of command from the lips of the Chinese robber chief which would launch the soul of the unfortunate Hibernian into eternity.

It was a moment of awful suspense. Poor Barney began to murmur fragments of a prayer and waited in agony, every instant expecting to receive the bullets which would put an end to his existence.

In the mouth of the prison cave Prince Kong stood overwhelmed with horror. He could not bear the thought that his companion should die in such a fearful manner.

For a moment he struggled with inward emotions. Then he made action.

Rushing forth from the cave, he cried in a manner half pleading, half authoritative:

"Hold—don't shoot him!"

Of course the prince spoke in Chinese and Barney did not understand him. But Li Ching did and turned about.

There was an evil, sardonic smile upon his lips.

"And why not, prince of the realm?" he asked, in a sarcastic tone.

"You must not—you shall not! Why do you seek to take his life?"

"We know that no ransom will be paid for him," declared Li Ching, coolly. "He is therefore of no value to us. Those who are not ransomed can never go from here alive."

"Then set him free!" cried Prince Kong, with a wave of his arm. "I will ransom him."

"Ha, then you will come to my terms!" cried Li Ching, in accents of triumph. "Well and good. His life is spared."

The bandit leader turned and gave sharp orders to his men. They lowered their rifles and two of them advanced and cut Barney's bonds.

The Celt was not a little surprised. He had not been able to understand the talk between Prince Kong and Li Ching, for it was in Chinese.

The guards now proceeded to lead Barney

back to the cave. Prince Kong had already returned there and was standing near the entrance with folded arms and an air of stern dignity.

"Begorra, prince, I owe yez me loife in some way, I don't know how!" exclaimed Barney. "I don't know what yez sed to the blather-skites, but I'm of the moind that ef yez hadn't spohke to thim, they'd have made an ind av Barney O'Shea in quick toime."

"Very likely, Barney," said Prince Kong, in English. "It was a narrow call for you. Thank your stars for the escape!"

"Bejabers, but what did yez say to the yaller-skinned omadhouns?"

"I told them that I would ransom you."

Barney's jaw fell.

"Ransom me?" he exclaimed, in amazement.

"Begorra, how would yez do that same whin yez can't ransom yersilf?"

"Ah, but I can do that. I have only to send word to the emperor to send the necessary sum in gold, and both of us will be set free by Li Ching."

"And will yez do that?"

"I am going to make Li Ching believe it. Look!"

Prince Kong drew a slip of peculiar-looking paper from his girdle. He held it up to the light.

Upon the outside of it was written a demand upon the royal exchequer for a large sum of money, to be paid for the ransom of Prince Kong and Barney O'Shea. Of course this was in Chinese characters, which Prince Kong interpreted to Barney.

"This I shall give to Li Ching," said the prince explanatively. "He will send it with three of his men to the emperor."

"I see," cried Barney, "an' thin the emperor will send back the money, I suppose?"

"No, he will not do that."

"Phwat?"

The prince held the paper up to the light. Barney gave a start.

"You see that I have written yet another message on this paper," declared Prince Kong. "It is executed with an invisible ink used only by the emperor and his court officers. The handwriting is not visible unless one holds the card so as to see through it. The moment the emperor sees this paper he will understand it."

"The divil!" ejaculated Barney, in surprise. "Phwat the divil does it say? I don't know as I kin iver rade thim hyroglyphics."

"It reads thus," pursued Prince Kong. "Behold the three bearers of this. Send a large force of men to the Crystal Mountain. Look for Li Ching's den in an old crater. Do not delay if you would save the life of Prince Kong."

Barney was astounded at this ingenious plan of the prince. He had not given Prince Kong credit for such shrewdness.

But before he could make comment, Li Ching himself appeared in the entrance to the cavern. Three men were at his back.

The bandit leader bowed suavely, and said:

"Most exalted prince, have you the order for the ransom yet?"

"I have," replied Prince Kong, in an artless manner. "Here it is. Take it directly to the emperor."

Li Ching took the slip of paper and read the inscription upon it. He never dreamed of looking for another message on the same paper. He bowed with a smile of content.

"It is well," he said. "This shall be sent to the emperor at once. With the return of the answer and the money you shall be set free."

Then the bandit chief withdrew. When they had gone, Prince Kong drew a deep breath, and turned to Barney:

"We have at least gained time," he declared.

"Now if there was only a way of escape."

"Begorra, we must foind wan," declared Barney. "We must be after lukin' for that same, an' moighty quick, too."

The two prisoners sat down and began to think of a feasible plan of escape. Both relapsed into a brown study. Barney was the first to hit upon an expedient.

"Begorra, I have it!" he cried, excitedly.

"Sure, we'll be as free as the air before another night or me name ain't Barney O'Shea."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the prince. "What is your plan, Barney?"

The Celt drew from his pocket a package of cigars. Then he also produced a small phial, which contained some peculiar liquid.

Holding this at arm's length he poured some of it onto the cigars. The prince watched him curiously.

"Do yez moind," said Barney, in a stage whisper. "Pretty quick I'll stroll down to the door an' give the blaggard of a guard there wan av these cigars. Afore he shokes wan inch av it he'll be as dead asleep as iver the piper of Conaughmulty."

"Ah!" exclaimed the prince, excitedly. "But you will need to wait until night for that, Barney."

"Shure, I know that," declared Barney. "But it ain't so very far off, I kin tell yez."

"You are right," agreed the prince. "But—

but are you sure the drug will work?"

"Am I sure av it?" exclaimed Barney, contemptuously. "Well, av I ain't I don't think nobody is. Jist wait a bit an' hould yer patience. That's all Barney O'Shea will ask."

"Enough," agreed Prince Kong. "I am patient, Barney. But have you reckoned all the chances? Although we disarm this guard there are others in the valley."

"Niver moind. I'll spohil thim, too," averred Barney, confidently. "Lave it to me."

With some suspense the coming of night was awaited. The afternoon wore away and soon darkness o'erspread the earth.

Not until well satisfied that most of the bandit camp were asleep did Barney venture to offer the guard at the cavern entrance the cigar. To the Celt's gratification he accepted it with avidity.

Barney was very obliging, even furnishing a light. The guard puffed away at the cigar. Barney returned to Prince Kong. Five minutes they waited, and then Barney crept to the entrance.

There lay the guard insensible. The drug had done its work. The coast was clear. Both prisoners glided out of the cavern.

They saw lights, which they believed guarded the entrance to the passage by which they had entered the crater. But at this moment Prince Kong clutched Barney's arm.

"We are discovered!" he gasped, in thrilling tones.

#### CHAPTER XXXVI.

##### THE FIGHT IN THE CABIN.

THE position of Frank Reade, Jr., was a peculiarly thrilling and dangerous one. A cruel assassin was creeping upon him while wrapped in sleep. A deadly knife was clutched in the villain's right hand.

To plunge this knife into Frank's breast was undoubtedly the purpose of the murderous wretch.

There seemed no power at hand to save the



famous inventor. Everybody in the cabin of the Eclipse's crew was asleep.

Nearer crept the would-be assassin. The expression upon his brutish face was devilish. Now he was upon the threshold of the state-room.

But fate had not prepared so summary an ending of Frank Reade, Jr.'s career. Even at the eleventh hour as it were the assassin's plans were overthrown.

Having in mind just such an exigency as the present, Frank Reade, Jr., had devised a unique

denly made a lunge forward to strike the knife into Frank's breast.

In an instant, as he encountered the netting, he received a terrible shock. It was as if giant arms had seized him and hurled him the whole length of the cabin.

At the same moment an electric gong began to clang, arousing everybody on board the ship.

In an instant Frank Reade, Jr., sprang up, and to his amazement saw the crowd of pirates in the cabin.

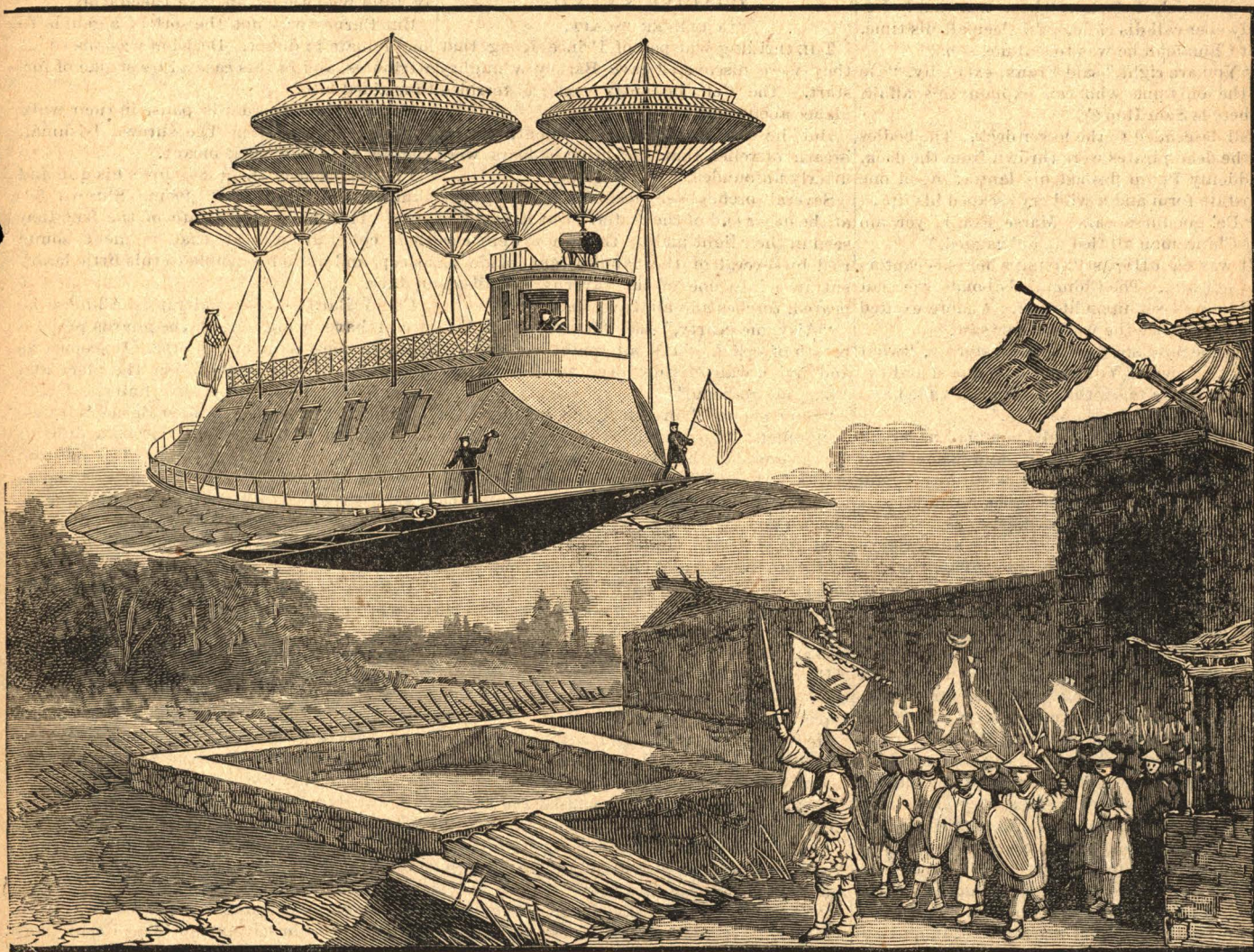
He comprehended the situation at a glance.

But the foremost of their number encouraged them by loud words, and they fired a volley at Frank and made a rush for him.

The charge was a terrific one, and could they have reached the great inventor it would have been the ending of his career.

But the steel netting, frail as it seemed, was endowed with the power of a hundred giants. With terrific force the pirates were hurled back.

At the same moment Dr. Vaneyke, Pomp and Squeers opened fire from different parts of



The gates of the fort opened, and, to the music of Chinese drums, a guard marched out. At their head walked, with stately tread, the commandant of the fort, a tall, heavy-featured Mongolian, wearing a dress richly trimmed and bedecked with gold braid.

means of defense. He was really entirely safe from the knives or bullets of his enemies.

Between his couch and the door there was stretched a partition of network of the finest but toughest of steel, cobweb-like, and in the dim light quite invisible to one in the cabin without the state-room. This was not seen by the pirates.

But this almost invisible network was bullet proof, and more than this was so adjusted that upon retiring Frank could press a button and charge it completely with the most powerful electric current.

A shot fired at the young inventor could do him no harm. Any attempt to reach him would be repelled by the heavily charged network of steel.

Not knowing this, the pirate assassin sud-

The pirates, with yells of rage, fired a volley at him.

But, to their amazement, the bullets never reached the target. Of course the netting, which was invisible to them, had stopped them.

Frank realized that the air-ship had been invaded, and that the guard must have been overpowered. Quick action alone would save the ship.

So the young inventor, without a word, picked up his rifle, and thrusting the muzzle through a loophole in the netting, opened fire upon the pirates.

As fast as he could work the repeater Frank fired into the horde. The result was destruction in the highest sense of the term.

For an instant the pirates wavered and seemed about to retreat.

This was too much for the pirates, and they broke ranks and fled.

Up the cabin stairs they went. Frank Reade, Jr., sprang from his state-room now, and shouting to the others, sprang up another stairway which led to the hurricane deck.

But just as he did this he pressed a button, which charged the main cabin stairs with electricity. This was to prevent the foe from again invading the cabin.

Upon the hurricane deck one had the complete range of the lower deck. Here the aerial voyagers poured a deadly volley into the pirate horde.

The foe had had enough. Satisfied that an aerial dragon favored those of the air-ship, they broke and fled with superstitious yells of terror.

Until the woods hid their dimly visible forms



from view the voyagers fired upon them, and the deck and the ground was strewn with dead pirates.

Thus, by prompt action, the foe was repulsed and the air-ship saved.

Of course the firing had aroused the fort. Lights were flashing on the palisades, and drums were beating.

Frank consulted his watch and then turned to Pomp.

"Look here, Pomp, this was your watch, was it not?"

"Fo' goodness sake, Marse Frank," sputtered the astonished dorky, "how wur dat? No-body eber call dis chile, an' I sleep all dis time. Dat Chinaman he was to call me, sah."

"You are right," said Frank, excitedly. "He is the only one who can explain this affair. Where is Sam Hop?"

All descended to the lower deck. The bodies of the dead pirates were thrown from the deck. Suddenly Pomp flashed his lantern upon one prostrate form and a wild cry escaped his lips.

"Fo' goodness sake, Marse Frank, yer am dat Chineeman all tied up an' gagged."

It was Sam Hop, still lying where his captors had left him. The Chinaman's bonds were cut and he was set upon his feet. A more excited washee-washee the world never saw.

"Come now, sir," said Frank, sternly, "what does this mean? You are left on guard and the first thing we know the air-ship is invaded and nearly captured by the pirates."

"Waitee, me tellee. 'Melican man hear Sam Hop, he no fault, jumpee on him when he no know it, hittee on head, knockee down. Sam Hop no hab use ob lilly tongue, no talkee, tie up. Sam Hop heap no good."

In spite of the seriousness of the affair Sam's words and manner was so comical that all were obliged to laugh. Thus the affair ended, but it was decided, much to the Chinaman's chagrin, that Sam Hop should no longer be put on, as night watch.

Of course there was no more sleep that night, but as morning was not far distant Frank Reade, Jr., began work on filling the storage jars and taking leave of the fort.

A stream of water was near, and a rubber pipe being placed in its waters the electric pump was put to work. In a very short time the air-ship's jars and tanks were filled.

Then Frank held a conference with the commandant of the fort.

It was decided that the refugees or the Daisy's party should remain at Kiang Chu for the present, while the air-ship went in quest of Barney and Prince Kong.

As soon as they were rescued it was decided that Frank should return to Kiang Chu, and the refugees should be taken to Hong Kong and placed aboard an American steamer. After which the mission of the Eclipse would be over and she might return home.

Just at break of day the Eclipse began to rise. Pomp had set the rotascope in motion. Like a mighty bird of prey the air-ship soared aloft.

Dr. Vaneyke set the course as nearly as possible for the Crystal Mountain. The Eclipse under full speed sailed away in that direction.

For hours she kept on, and it was in the latter part of the day that Dr. Vaneyke, who was on the hurricane deck with a glass, shouted to Frank Reade, Jr.:

"Yonder is the Crystal Mountain," he cried. "Two points to the westward."

Frank turned his glass in that direction. The cone of the mighty extinct volcano was plainly visible with the naked eye. Every moment the

air-ship drew nearer, and somehow later hovered over the mountain.

All were at the rail scrutinizing the surface of the country below, when suddenly a wild cry burst from Frank Reade, Jr.'s lips:

"Slacken speed on the rotascopes, Pomp," he cried. "Let her down quickly."

Pomp hastened to obey. What Frank had seen was also seen by others. Two men in the crevice of the cliffs were valiantly defending themselves against a force of several hundred. Their position was a desperate one.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### A CLEVER ESCAPE.

THE thrilling whisper of Prince Kong that they were discovered gave Barney a mighty start. The Celt instantly cast a terrified glance about him.

But he saw in the same moment, with a breath of relief, that the prince's fears were utterly unfounded.

Several torches were flashing in the gloom at the other end of the crater. But it could be seen in their light plainly that they were carried by several of the bandits who made an entrance into one of the caverns, and disappeared, torches and all, from sight.

"Aisy, me hearty," said Barney, with a deep breath of relief. "It's all roight we are yit, and divil a wan of thim need we fear. Come along, me gosssoon!"

"Sure enough!" breathed the prince, with deep relief. "I feared that we were lost. Now for the guard at the passage of exit."

"Lave them to me," said Barney, confidently. "Ye'll foind that I kin handle thim to the queen's taste."

"I am perfectly willing to do that," whispered Prince Kong, "and I have perfect confidence in your ability. Lead on!"

Barney did lead on. In a cautious manner the Celt crossed the space to the vicinity of the passage of exit.

Barney had trailed Indians on the prairies of the far West with Frank Reade, Jr., and had learned well the art of strategy.

He was very skillful and adroit in accomplishing his purpose. Like a shadow he made his way through the gloom.

At an angle in the cliff he paused and turned to the prince.

Just ahead a small watch-fire could be seen. Two armed bandits were by it and guarded the mouth of the passage of the exit.

"Now, I'll tell yez," said Barney, in a stage whisper. "If yez will sthay here for a jiffy I'll thry an' paralyze thim haythins."

"What do you mean?" asked the prince, apprehensively. "Surely you are no match for those two armed men."

Barney elevated his nose in a knowing and comical manner.

"If yez will jist hear me," he said, confidently, "I'll thry an' illusthrate to yez what I mane. Will yez sthay here an' don't move a finger or a toe till I get back?"

"Of course," agreed the prince. "I will do as you say."

"All roight. Kape yure weather eye open, an' whin I say whist, now! jist come roight along like a good mon."

"All right," agreed the prince, with only a vague idea of Barney's meaning.

The Celt had deprived the drugged guard of his weapons. These were a rifle, a long sword and two pistols with a cartridge belt. With the sword in his hand Barney crept along toward the mouth of the cavern.

Hovering in the shadows, unseen by the

guard, the ingenious Irishman began to study a plan by which he could overcome this barrier to certain escape.

To rush out and attack them openly would hardly admit of a successful result. The alarm would be given, and undoubtedly before they could make good their escape, the foe would be hot after them.

Barney abandoned this plan.

"If I only cud separate the omadhouns," he muttered, "I'd thrust to luck in running up behindt wan av' the divils an' lay him out with the sword. But if I thried it now wan av' thim wud see me an' give the alarm."

But Barney was not the sort of a genius to long remain in doubt. Decision was one of his attributes, and in this case a rare stroke of fortune aided him.

He saw the two guards pause in their walk and hold a conference. The shrewd Irishman guessed at once what it meant.

Presently one of them laid down his gun and skulked away into the gloom. Shrewd fellows! They were well aware of the fact that their chieftain was at that moment sound asleep, and quite insensible to this little laxity of duty.

Could Barney have understood Chinese he would have heard one of the guards propose going in quest of an opium pipe. It seemed as if one guard was enough for the place and time. Two was plainly a superfluity.

A thrill of triumph pervaded Barney's frame. He believed that it would not be a difficult matter to handle one Chinaman. The question now was how to do it without raising an alarm.

After the departure of his companion, the remaining guard paced slowly up and down, but pausing at intervals to listen and watch for the return.

It was plain that his mind was distracted by this proceeding. Barney saw in it his opportunity.

Suddenly Prince Kong, from his hiding-place, witnessed the enactment of a thrilling scene.

He saw the guard standing at the end of his beat, watching for the return of his opium-hunting companion. Next he saw a crouching form just behind the sentry.

It was Barney.

The Celt held his clubbed rifle in his hand. With a lightning move he swung it aloft and brought it down upon the guard's head. Without a groan he dropped insensible.

The move had been made—the pass was won. Barney drew himself up and turned a jubilant countenance toward Prince Kong, first snatching up the torch the guard had carried.

"Whisht now, me dear friend," he called, in a hoarse whisper. "For the love of Hiven, come quick!"

In another instant Prince Kong was by his side.

"My brave Barney!" he exclaimed, with deep feeling, "this is all owing to your pluck. Only to think that I should stand there all this while and be no help to you."

"Don't speak av that," said Barney, hurriedly. "We must be off, for the other divil may show up at any moment. Bejabers, yez had better take this chap's gun."

"You are right!"

Prince Kong hastened to remove the unconscious sentry's cartridge belt and took his gun. Barney took a fresh torch from a pile near and lit it.

Then both plunged into the passage of exit. It was a downward course and they pressed forward on the run. There was need of haste,



for at any moment their escape might be discovered, and the result would, no doubt, be serious, if they did not speedily get beyond pursuit.

So they dashed on at a rapid rate. They heard nothing of sounds of pursuit in their rear. After what seemed an interminable length of time, they emerged from the cavern and were near the shores of the lake.

"Bejabers, fhwere is the air-ship?" cried Barney, in dismay.

"It is gone!"

At first Barney could hardly reconcile himself to this thought. Then it occurred to him that, after all, he could hardly expect those on the air-ship to remain in this one spot all the while.

"I have it," he cried, with inspiration. "Shure they hove bin lukin' fer us all around an' we'll have to wait for daylight to be shure to see thim at all—at all."

"That is the proper explanation," agreed Prince Kong. "Well, it will be hardly safe to remain here long."

Daybreak found them far up among the crags of the mountain. Barney scanned the sky in vain for some sign of the air-ship.

To add to their misfortunes they got lost among the fastnesses and it was late in the afternoon when Barney suddenly clutched the prince's arm and pulled him into a crevice in the cliff.

"Bejabers, the divils are comin'!" he declared, excitedly. "Don't yez see thim?"

This was true. Fully three hundred of the bandits, a legion of them, swarmed down over the rocks and charged upon the two unfortunate escaped prisoners. Barney and the prince were both resolved to die rather than yield.

So they sought refuge in the crevice behind the cover of rocks, and began to fire at their foe.

It was certain, however, that they would have been quickly overwhelmed, had it not been for an unlooked for and welcome development.

Barney suddenly gave a wild yell of delight and pointed upward.

"Look, prince!" he cried, wildly. "Be me sowl, there's the air-ship at lasht!"

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

##### IN PURSUIT OF WING HO.

THE two men fighting against several hundred Chinese bandits, as seen from the air-ship's deck, were no others of course than Barney and Prince Kong.

They were instantly recognized by all, and Pomp leaning over the rail gave a wild yell.

"Ki yi, dar l'ish! Don' yo' be 'fraid. We'se gwine fo' to sabe yo'. Done glad yo' amn't dead."

"Whurroo!" yelled Barney, loud enough for all on the air-ship to hear him. "The blissing av an Otrishman's heart on yez, naygur. It's happy I am to see yez handsome face wanst more."

At this moment the bandits caught sight of the air-ship. It was the first time they had ever beheld the Eclipse and as was common they were dumfounded.

A superstitious horror seized them, and though they were several hundred in number, they broke ranks and fled incontinently.

Frank sent an electric bomb after them to intensify their respect for the air-ship. It struck a corner of the cliff, and with a tremendous explosion shattered tons of rock. This was enough for the bandits.

The caves and honeycombed interior of the

Crystal Mountain quickly swallowed up the whole body of them.

The air-ship descended, and Barney and the prince were quickly taken on board.

The reunion was a joyous one. To say that both Barney and Prince Kong were glad to get back to the Eclipse would be invidious.

The prince with tears in his eyes wrung Frank's hand.

"I tell you that this realm would have been without its prince but for you and your air-ship, Mr. Reade," he declared. "I had no idea that such lawless bands of robbers really existed in these parts. The emperor certainly does not dream of it, or the proper scavengers would have been sent here long ago."

It seemed as if the mission of Frank Reade, Jr., and the electric Eclipse was at an end.

The Daisy's party had been rescued and were safe at Fort Kiang Chu. All that was necessary now was to take them to a safe point.

"Then we will sail for home, friends," declared Frank. "Our journey has been a successful one, as we may believe."

"I have enough material of an exciting sort to write a book as bulky as Webster's Unabridged!" declared Squeers, with an air of satisfaction. "Won't I be the lion of the press when once I strike New York again. I am the only newspaper man in the world to take a trip aboard Frank Reade, Jr.'s air-ship!"

"I wish that money was an object," said Prince Kong, disappointedly; "the air-ship and Mr. Reade would remain in the Chinese kingdom until every pirate from here to the Ladrone had received punishment."

"Indeed, they deserve it!" declared Dr. Van-eyke.

"Me go back to 'Meliky with Yankee man!" declared Sam Hop, jubilantly. "Workee for 'Melican man. Washee shirtee, cookee allee samee be his slave."

It seemed as if Prince Kong almost envied Sam his engagement. He had acquired a deep liking for Frank Reade, Jr., and would have much liked to remain aboard the air-ship indefinitely.

But this was impossible. Prince Kong was a prince of the blood, and would some day, no doubt, be the ruler of the Flowery Kingdom.

Allegiance to his people forbade his adopting a new country as his home. Besides, Frank Reade, Jr., was not desirous of forming a partnership with any one.

The great inventor seemed to read the mind of the prince, and acting upon sudden impulse said:

"Prince, I did not come to your country to wage a war of extermination upon the pirates who infest your coasts, but I came here simply and solely to rescue the Daisy's party. However, I will tell you this. Before I leave China I will pay a visit to Wing Ho' den and wipe out his murderous gang."

"Will you?" cried the prince, delightedly. "It will be a favor which I can assure you I shall appreciate."

"I will do it."

Frank went into the pilot-house and at once set a course for Wing Ho's den. The air-ship was now making a rapid flight.

It was after dark when the coast was reached and the search-light was employed to locate their position.

By means of this familiar points were identified and finally the air-ship hung a thousand feet over the little bay in which six of the pirate junks were anchored.

Three more were safely moored in the mighty cliff cavern. In the search-light's glare

the pirates could be seen rushing about the decks and apparently much excited over the re-appearance of the air-ship.

They were hastily trying to weigh anchor and put to sea, probably to escape if possible the deadly bombs of which they had good reason to expect and to fear.

Frank Reade, Jr., smiled grimly as he noted this.

It was his firm purpose to if possible blow to pieces every one of the pirate junks. With this purpose in view he directed Barney to bring him some bombs.

"Hold the ship steady," he directed Pomp, who was in the pilot-house.

Presently Barney came with the bombs. The search-light made all below as plain as day.

On one of the junks Frank saw a gang of pirates trying to elevate the muzzle of a cannon so as to send a shot up to the air-ship.

The great inventor smiled and then held one of the electric bombs over the rail.

He held it steady until a favorable moment. Then he allowed it to drop. Down it went like a flash.

It struck fair in the middle of the junk's deck. The result was fearful.

There was a mighty upheaving of the timbers, the air was filled with a vivid glare, the air-ship even at its altitude felt the force of the vibration, and the junk was in a twinkling a drifting wreck.

Water poured into the wreck, and in three minutes from the dropping of the bomb it sunk.

Prince Kong watched the result with a peculiar fascination.

"Wonderful!" he cried. "Mr. Reade, you could whip the navies of the world."

"I will admit that I could give them a hard rub," declared Frank. "One of the death-ships is out of the way."

"Right!" cried the prince, with much joy.

"By all means destroy the others."

"I will."

Frank now gave orders to Pomp, who shifted the position of the air-ship. They were now just above another of the junks.

Once again Frank went to the rail with one of the bombs.

This one somehow missed its mark. It struck the water close by the junk.

In a moment a column of water one hundred feet high rose over the junk. The vessel heeled over until it lay fairly upon its side.

The waves rushed over it like a devouring monster, and when they subsided it drifted a hopeless wreck. The water could be seen to be full of struggling forms.

One more bomb blew the third junk into fragments. The waters of the bay were covered with the floating debris.

Scores of the terrified pirates could be seen endeavoring to swim ashore. Frank might have exterminated the whole of them.

A less scrupulous conqueror would have done so, but the world-famous inventor was not of that merciless kind.

"I am not here to slaughter defenseless beings," he declared, grimly. "I think that it will be lesson enough to Wing Ho to break up his vile nest."

But now a problem confronted Frank Reade, Jr. The waters of the bay were clear. He had disposed of that part of the pirate fleet, but there yet remained three more of the death-ships, and they were well protected by the high arched cavern.

For a time Frank Reade, Jr., was at a loss



how to act, but an idea presently occurred to him.

### CHAPTER XXXIX.

#### INTO THE LION'S JAWS.

FRANK wasted but a very few moments in thought as to a new course of action. The search-light's rays carefully swept over the waters of the bay, and Frank saw that by this time most of the swimming pirates had either succumbed or had reached the shore.

It would have seemed an easy matter for the air-ship also to have entered the cavern where the three junks were.

But it required but an instant's reflection upon Frank's part to conceive that this would be a fatal move.

They would be almost sure to get a volley from the guns of the junks and such a fragile vessel as the Eclipse would be easily wrecked.

A battle at close quarters was one never to be sought by the air-ship. None were better aware of this than Frank Reade, Jr.

But the plan he had hit upon would clearly obviate any such contingency. He proceeded at once to carry it into execution.

"Pomp!" he said, sharply, "you are a good swimmer, are you not?"

"Golly, Marse Frank, I am jes' yo' chile fo' dat," replied the darky, eagerly. "What am de racket now?"

"Begorra, don't yez thrust anything of the kind to the naygur, Mither Frank!" cried Barney, eagerly. "It's meself as could swim acrost the Chinayse Say."

"Shut up yo' mouf, I fish!" shouted Pomp, angrily, shaking his head in a pugnacious way at Barney. "I jes' break yo' jaw fo' yo' if yo' tells me any mo' lies."

"Bejabers, no ape-faced son of an African can talk to Barney O'Shea in that manner fer nothin'!" roared Barney, flinging off his coat. "Dance up here, me gossoon, an' I'll tache ye the Tipperary dance in half of no time. Whur-rool have at ye!"

But for the interposition of Frank Reade, Jr., the two belligerents would then and there have indulged in a social mill. But the famous inventor put up his hand.

"Stop!" he said, sternly. "No more of that. If you don't behave yourselves neither of you shall go."

This had the desired effect. Both sobered down at once.

"What am it yo' wants me fo' to do, Marse Frank?" asked Pomp.

"It is a feat which is dangerous in the extreme, yet I believe it can be safely worked by using care and judgment."

All were listening intently.

"We shall let you down to the water by a steel line," declared Frank, "and it will be fastened to the rubber swimming suit which you will find in my cabin. There will be two of these steel wires or lines. One of them, after swimming into the cavern, you must fasten to the hull of one of the junks there anchored, and also attach to it one of my electric torpedoes. Then swim out again, and we will draw you aboard. I want you to make this trip three times, or until we have blown to perdition every one of the junks in the cavern."

Pomp ducked his head and grinned, showing his ivories as he did so.

"A'right, Marse Frank. I jes' do what yo' tole me."

"Bejabers, it's partiality yez are gettin', naygur," declared Barney, lugubriously.

"Marse Frank jes' knows who am de bes' man," declared Pomp, with a grin.

Barney glared at the darky savagely, but this little spat was brought to an end by Frank himself, who began at once to hastily issue orders as to what should be done.

The steel wires were brought from the cabin, and one of them was fastened to Pomp's waist.

First, however, the darky donned one of the rubber swimming suits, which were an invention of Frank's. These were so constructed that one could travel any distance in the water without any danger of sinking from exhaustion.

Then Pomp was lowered over the rail. Down he went in the darkness, until a jerk on the line told those on board the air-ship that he had reached the water safely.

For an instant Frank withdrew the slide to the search-light and threw its penetrating rays into the mouth of the cavern. This was to enable Pomp to set his course.

Of course there was a possibility that the pirates in the cavern might see Pomp swimming in the water. He was plainly seen from the deck of the air-ship for one brief instant.

Then the search-light was shut off and darkness was the order. Breathless with suspense, those on board the air-ship stood by the rail paying out the line and returning Pomp's signals by jerking on the line.

By means of this system of telegraphy, Frank was able to follow Pomp's course into the cavern, and was even advised of the moment when he affixed the torpedo to the hull of one of the junks.

The famous inventor was thrilled with the success of his plan. He knew that the mission entrusted to Pomp was a hazardous one, but he had full faith in the darky's discretion and strategic ability.

To be seen by one of the pirates would have been a fatal thing for the plucky darky. He would never have lived to get out of the cavern.

But he was not seen by the foe, and presently the signal came for the return.

Soon they were pulling in the steel line over the air-ship's rail. Then the perpendicular line was evidence that Pomp was just underneath.

All hands now took hold, and the darky was quickly hauled aboard the air-ship. As he came over the rail Frank Reade, Jr., sprang forward and said:

"You succeeded in your purpose, did you not, Pomp?"

"I jes' reckon I did, Marse Frank," replied Pomp, coolly. "An' dis chile am a'ready fo' another try."

"You have done well," cried Frank, excitedly. "Turn on the search-light, Barney. Stand back, everybody."

The glare of the search-light was thrown down into the cavern entrance once more. The steel wire could be plainly seen.

Frank had hastily connected his end of the wire with the largest dynamo in the engine-room.

Then he pressed a key and the current was on. Synonymous with that act came the terrific explosion.

It came from the cavern's mouth like muffled thunder. Pieces of blazing wood, debris and a cloud of objects of all sorts came flying out and spread upon the boiling waters.

But all was over in a few seconds and there was good reason to believe that another of the death-ships had gone to destruction. Slowly but surely the Eclipse was wiping out of existence the fleet of Wing Ho.

Wild yells and cries of consternation and terror now came from the cavern.

Of course the pirates had no means of knowing how the Eclipse had fired the deadly bomb with such certainty into the cavern. In this retreat they had deemed themselves safe.

But it seemed as if they were no safer there than in the open waters of the bay. This could not fail to produce consternation in their midst.

Frank Reade, Jr., was highly elated. Thus far the plans were working well.

"They cannot defeat the Eclipse," he declared, confidently. "I tell you, Prince Kong, you will shortly have nothing more to fear from Wing Ho."

"Wonderful!" cried the prince, with exuberance of feeling. "Surely, Mr. Reade, with your inventions you need not fear the armies or navies of any country on the face of the earth. China could never afford to make an enemy of you."

"I will confess that I have great power in the Eclipse," replied Frank, modestly. "But I will never use it in an oppressive way, except in the defense of law and humanity."

But these congratulations, it soon proved, were early made. A crisis, all unsuspected, was near at hand.

Once more Pomp was lowered over the rail. Once more, under cover of darkness, he swam into the cavern. More than the expected space of time elapsed and no sign came from him.

"That is queer!" muttered Frank.

He resorted to the system of signaling. No answer came back. Finally, becoming thoroughly alarmed, those on board the air-ship began to draw in the line.

Long before it assumed the perpendicular they knew that Pomp was not at the end of it. What did it mean? Certainly it looked as if harm had come to the brave darky.

### CHAPTER XL.

#### POMP A PRISONER.

UPON reaching the water Pomp had as before swam fearlessly into the cavern. He could see the lights of the two remaining pirate junks and easily located them.

Through the pile of debris which filled the water he made his way toward the nearest of the junks.

He had the bomb already in his hand to affix to the hull of the ship. His position in the water was in total darkness, so that he felt perfectly secure. He never dreamed of such a thing as capture.

The darky swam leisurely toward the nearest junk. As he drew near its stern, he saw the evidence of considerable disturbance upon the deck.

The crew were running excitedly about and the beating of a Chinese drum was heard as if the crew were being called to quarters.

Then suddenly a great light filled the cavern. Some of the ship's crew had gone ashore and lit a pile of inflammable material there piled up, and the light was sufficiently strong to dispel the gloom for a wide distance about.

Pomp at the moment was not twenty feet from the hull of the junk in which he had intended to place the bomb.

So sudden and unexpected was the appearance of the light, that the darky was taken completely by surprise. There he was, plainly visible upon the surface of the water.

And in that instant he was seen by those on board the junk. Wild yells were uttered, and Pomp saw that he was covered by the rifles of the pirates.

The darky was completely dumfounded, and for a moment hardly knew how to act.



"Golly sakes!" he gasped, rolling up the whites of his eyes. "Now I am in fo' it fo' suah! What am eber dis nig gwine fo' to do? I clar' fo' goodness dey'll shoot dis chile fust ting yo' knows."

Pomp's teeth chattered like castanets. He was well warranted in his fear.

But he was not fired at by the pirates. The captain of the junk who stood upon the poop-deck gave a ringing command and the pirates lowered their rifles.

At the same moment, from across the junk bows, a long sampan, propelled by six stalwart oarsmen, shot into view.

Straight down upon Pomp bore the sampan. All was done so quickly that the darky had really no chance to offer resistance. The next moment powerful arms had seized him, and he was lifted out of the water, swimming suit and all.

In doing this the hook attached to the steel wire slipped off, and the wire vanished in the gloom. This was unnoticed by the pirates, who saw only the form of a man in a rubber swimming suit.

Into the sampan and the midst of the excited crowd of pirates Pomp was pulled.

The rubber suit was pulled off him, and in a twinkling his arms were bound behind him. The excited jabbering of the pirates nearly crazed the darky.

"Gorramighty!" he gasped, with cold beads of sweat breaking out upon him, "dis chile am in a bad scrape. I done fink dey jes' kill me fo' suah. Neber see Marse Frank nor de Eclipse agin!"

He knew that it was of no use to appeal to the yellow-skinned captors. So he maintained a deep silence.

The sampan was quickly rowed to the shore. At the spot where the big blaze lit up the cavern a landing was made.

A great crowd of the pirates were there gathered, and as Pomp was brought ashore one of them stepped forward and confronted him. It was Wing Ho.

The pirate chief was the personification of fury and rage. He regarded Pomp with savage mien, his talon-like fingers working convulsively like the claws of a hawk.

"Well, nigger," he grunted, "ye've run yer head into a nice scrape, haven't ye? So ye are the one who blew up my best ship! Curse ye, it'll be the last ye'll ever blow up!"

"A'right, sah," said Pomp, with much indifference, born of cool grit. "Dunno as it makes so berry much diffrunce to dis chile. I hab done my pahnt, sah, an' Marse Frank kain't find no fault whateber."

"I wish it was yer master I had instead of you," roared Wing Ho, savagely. "He'd never build another air-ship. Curse him! Why should he come here meddling with me?"

"What fo' yo' catch American people an' keep dem prisoners?" retorted Pomp. "Jes' like enuff Marse Frank neber come to dis country at all ef yo' hadn't done dat."

"Yes, it was an unlucky day that I meddled with the Daisy's crew," growled the pirate chief. "I might have known better. Whoever runs up against Uncle Sam or any of his people will get the worst of it."

Wing Ho made a motion to his men and Pomp was led away into the cavern. To the darky's surprise his life was spared.

For a few moments the darky was unable to fathom this move on Wing Ho's part. But an explanation came soon after.

In the cavern wall, a small square chamber

had been dug out of the solid rock. This had a door of iron in which was a grated window.

Into this dungeon Pomp was led, and an oil lamp was placed upon a shelf in one corner. Then armed guards began to pace up and down in front of the door.

Pomp was in a curious state of mind. He naturally wondered what would be the sensations of those on board the Eclipse when it was discovered that he was captured.

"I done fink Marse Frank will try fo' to rescue me," he concluded, hopefully. "An' if dese yere debbils don' kill me afo' dat time, I jes' gwine fo' to lib aftah all."

While thus engaged in soliloquy the door suddenly opened. The tall form of Wing Ho crossed the threshold.

In the dim light of the miserable oil lamp, Pomp could see that there was a hunted light in the villain's eyes, an anxious expression upon his face.

He closed the door after him, and then looking about as if anxious that no eavesdropper should be about, he approached Pomp, and with an affectation of confidence said:

"Look here, my friend, I want to have a talk with yqu."

"Well, sah?" said Pomp, coolly.

"Now, I'll tell ye how I'm fixed. I'm an American, the same as you, and your master, Frank Reade, Jr. I left New York some years ago under a cloud. Since then I've been knocking about in this God-forsaken part of the world. But I'm gettin' tired of it. See?"

"Yes," said Pomp, vaguely.

"I'm willin' an' I'm anxious to quit it. Now in course it won't do for me to go back to America. But I want to reach some English-speaking country. I've thought of Australia. I think I could turn over a new leaf and begin life anew there and be a better man."

Pomp nodded his head and inwardly wondered what the fellow was driving at.

"Now I did think of having my men stand ye up for a target, nigger," continued Wing Ho, curtly, "but I've got a better plan. I'm goin' to give ye yer life on one condition."

Pomp rolled up his eyes.

"What am dat?" he asked eagerly.

"That ye'll go to yer master—Frank Reade, Jr.—an' intercede for me. If he'll agree to land me safe an' sound in Australia, I'll surrender my whole army an' everything I've got here. That's fair enough."

"Well, sah, I jes' tell yo' what I fink," said Pomp, plainly. "I fink Marse Frank won't do no such a fing, but I'll tell him jes' de same if yo' lets me go free."

"But he won't refuse," said Wing Ho, with a crafty gleam in his eyes. "I know that he won't. I am a countryman of his. I mean to lead a new and better life. If he's a Christian he'll help me to reform."

Before Pomp could make any reply an astounding thing occurred. There was a dull, thunderous roar, the walls of the cavern shook, and Pomp and Wing Ho were prostrated.

When they gained their feet the shock was over, but they were in total darkness. But all was not over yet. The first shock was succeeded by another, and the walls of the cavern seemed likely to fall in.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### BLOWN OUT TO SEA.

It was a startling conviction that dawned upon Frank Reade, Jr., and the other voyagers on board the Eclipse, when it was found upon drawing in the line that Pomp was not at the end of it.

What did it mean? Where was the darky? What had happened to him?

All gazed aghast at each other and for a moment silence reigned. Then Frank Reade, Jr., said:

"Great heavens! Harm has come to Pomp. What shall we do?"

That was indeed a problem of no mean sort. What could be done under the circumstances? Certainly the Eclipse could not enter the cavern to effect a rescue. A cannon shot from the junks might wreck the frail air-ship.

"But something must be done!" cried Dr. Vaneyke, excitedly. "Pomp must not be given up. He is too valuable a man to lose."

"Begorra, that's phwat I say mesilf!" cried Barney. "Shure he's only a naygur, but it's a white man's heart he's got."

"Is there no plan?" asked Caleb Squeers.

Prince Kong looked his sorrow, and Sam Hop wiped the oblique corners of his eyes and wept in Chinese fashion.

All felt bad for Pomp. But Frank Reade, Jr., would not give the brave darky up.

"I shall not believe that he is dead until I have seen his body!" he declared. "And there must be a plan devised to rescue him."

"Bejabbers, it's mesilf as has a plan!" cried Barney.

All eyes turned upon the Celt.

"What is it?"

"Jist let me take a swimming suit, Misther Frank, an' I'll jist go down an' I'll not come back until I've found the naygur."

This was a brave offer. But Frank Reade, Jr., shook his head.

"That would never do," he declared. "I can't afford to lose both of you. But I'll not give Pomp up yet. Turn the search-light down and examine the water below carefully."

This was done and the waters of the bay were carefully scrutinized. But all without avail.

There were piles of floating wreckage and timbers from the ruined junks, and even dead bodies floating about, but no live man was to be seen.

Of course, one of the floating bodies might be Pomp, but the Eclipse's voyagers would not entertain that idea. Finally the search was reluctantly abandoned.

But what was to be done? This was a problem of no ordinary sort. But before the question could be answered, or any plan devised, a thrilling incident occurred.

There was a sudden, distant muffled report like thunder, which came in billows through the dark atmosphere.

It was followed by a series of heavier reverberations, and the air-ship began to pitch with some violent agitation of the air.

Also, in the light of the search-light, the waters of the bay below were seen to heave and toss in a violent manner.

Nearly every one on the air-ship's deck were at first prostrated, but they quickly regained their feet, and Barney cried in terror:

"Och hone! pwhativer has happened now? Is it the worruld come to an ind?"

But Dr. Vaneyke cried:

"It is an earthquake! I think we had better change our base, Frank. We will hardly be safe here."

"An earthquake!" gasped Frank Reade, Jr., "You are right, doctor. Barney, start the telescope at once. We must get out of here in double-quick time."

Barney sprang to the pilot-house. But just as his hand was upon the lever the Celt chanced to turn his head and beheld a terrible sight.



The blackness of the night was suddenly obliterated by a vivid lightning flash. The country beyond the cliff cavern could be seen as plainly as if under the glare of noonday.

And it presented a terrifying aspect. Trees were seen to be bent double, the air was filled with flying debris, and a mighty, thunderous roar was heard.

That one vivid moment of brilliant light revealed a horrifying and comprehensive truth to all on board the air-ship.

"A tornado!" shrieked Caleb Squeers. "My God! We cannot escape it! We shall be lost."

The earthquake carried in its wake a fearful typhoon, and in another instant it must strike the air ship.

It would seem as if the frail vessel must be dashed into fragments by that terrific blast. And those on board seemed powerless to prevent the catastrophe.

Only for an instant did the lightning reveal the approach of the typhoon, then blackness and uncertainty succeeded, but only for another instant, when the storm came in all its fury.

Barney's hand had been upon the rotascope lever. Instinctively he turned it. The next moment the air-ship was seized by a mighty force and hurled through space.

But the turning of the lever was the saving of the Eclipse. What followed was ever after a jumbled mass of nightmare events.

Every one was hurled to the deck and obliged to cling to the nearest objects, while all was a roaring void of chaos and confusion all about them. The air-ship seemed whirling through space like a top.

No one on board expected to outlive that horrible experience. How long it continued they never knew, but suddenly the air-ship became steadier and finally ceased rocking and pitching altogether.

The rotascopes were revolving at a terrific rate, and of course the air-ship was shooting upward through space. It would soon have entered the upper atmosphere, where life could not be long supported, but for the prompt work of Barney, who sprang to the lever and reversed it.

The Celt had been hurled across the pilot-house and had lain half insensible in one corner during all. But he quickly recovered now that the danger point was passed.

Barney renewed the electric lights and the deck was made as plain as day. Rather a comical sight was there revealed.

It could not be seen that the air-ship was materially injured, but from various corners of the deck and out-of-the-way places the terrified voyagers now began to creep.

Frank Reade, Jr., had clung to one of the rotascope standards through all. A number of times he had narrowly escaped being carried away by the blast.

Prince Kong had clung to another standard. Sam Hop emerged from a heap of debris near the fore-cabin. The Chinaman was badly shaken up and much terrified.

Caleb Squeers had been blown into the hold of the ship and there he fell into a dirty tub of water.

He emerged completely saturated and supremely disgusted, and his appearance was greeted with roars of laughter.

Dr. Vaneyke had taken the precaution to spring into the main-cabin. There he had wrestled with chairs and tables and received many bruises.

But on the whole, all had good reason to congratulate themselves upon a very narrow escape from death.

Certainly the Eclipse had proved herself a

stanch and noble craft to have outridden that gale. It was, however, no doubt owing to Barney's presence of mind in having set the rotascopes in motion.

These had carried the air-ship above the tornado, which had passed beneath, and was probably ere this far out to sea.

But where were they? In what direction had they been carried, and how far? This was a question quite impossible to answer. All was darkness most dense. It was quite impossible to set an accurate course, and there seemed no other way but to wait for the coming of dawn.

So the air-ship was held in suspension, waiting the appearance of daylight. It came at last, and as the mist cleared before the sun, the blue sea was seen far beneath them.

Its broad bosom lay calm and placid below. But as far as the eye could reach, no sign of land was to be seen.

Where were they? How far had they been carried by the typhoon? These were questions to be answered at once.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### A DARING COUP-DE-MAIN.

FRANK READE, JR., began at once to take bearings as well as he could. In a short while he announced his belief that the typhoon had carried the air-ship fully one hundred miles out over the Yellow Sea.

Course was at once set for the return to the starting point, or the pirate's cavern.

The air-ship was soon en route, and the spirits of all arose as they felt the glorious sunlight and the fresh, morning breeze.

"We will bring Wing Ho and his crew to terms to-day," declared Frank, confidently. "I hope to be able to set our course for Hong Kong in three days."

"It's roight glad I'll be to see dear ould Ameriky onct more," cried Barney. "But I'd loike moighty well to have the naygur go back with me. Rest his sowl."

"Don't give up hope, Barney," cried Frank. "Pomp may turn up yet all right."

As the air-ship could easily sail thirty or forty miles an hour, it was reckoned that land would be sighted in less than three hours. If this became a fact, the pirates' den should be reached before the hour of noon.

Barney gave full speed to the propeller and the Eclipse swept through the air like a mighty bird of prey.

All kept a good watch of the horizon, and sure enough, before the three hours were up, a cry from Barney caused all to rush to the rail. There, dimly visible upon the distant horizon, was a line of coast.

The Eclipse now rapidly drew nearer to the land. Very soon the high promontory was seen which sheltered the bay leading into the cliff cavern.

As the air-ship approached nothing was seen of any of the Chinese pirates. The wreckage of the dismantled junks were seen floating in the waters of the bay.

The other junks were concealed in the mighty high-arched cavern. The place looked dismantled and deserted.

"It looks sort of desolate down there," said Dr. Vaneyke. "Do you suppose they have fled the place, Frank?"

"I hardly know what to make of it," said Frank, thoughtfully.

"If so, where can they have gone?"

"I cannot imagine. They could not hide in a safer place."

"You are right. It is a question in my mind how they could ever be dislodged."

"There is one way," said Prince Kong.

"What?"

"To besiege them."

"Ah!" said Frank, dubiously, "that would require too much time. But I will soon find a way to chase the rat out of the trap. Ah, what is that?"

Caleb Squeers was in the bow of the air-ship. A loud and startled cry suddenly went up from his lips.

"Look! look!" he cried. "Is not that our man Pomp?"

Sure enough, upon the verge of the cliff there stood a personage, who, if not Pomp himself, was certainly his prototype. He was waving his arms excitedly and shouting to those on board the air-ship.

"It is Pomp!" cried Dr. Vaneyke.

"Be me sowl, it's the naygur himself!" shouted Barney, wild with delight. "Whurroo! shall I let down the ship, Mistor Frank?"

"Of course!" replied Frank, who was himself overjoyed to see his faithful servitor once more alive and well.

Barney sprang to the rotascope lever and switched off the current. The air-ship settled down like a great bird and soon rested upon the ground on the very brow of the cliff.

Pomp rushed to meet his friends.

We left the darty in the cavern dungeon cell with Wing Ho at the close of a preceding chapter, and just as the first shock of the earthquake came.

Both Pomp and Wing Ho were prostrated by the shock. It seemed for a moment as if the very walls of the cavern were about to fall in.

But they did not, and the earthquake shock was soon over. But Wing Ho was quickly upon his feet and rushed from the cell.

It required but a glance at the waters of the bay in the lightning's glare to see that a violent storm was in progress. Then the pirate leader returned to the cell.

"It is a typhoon!" he said, explanatively to Pomp. "Do ye believe it will wreck yer air-ship?"

Pomp trembled as this fear swept over him. But he remembered that the Eclipse had survived a previous storm of the same kind; and he believed that it would this one.

"I done fink de Eclipse am good fo' mos' any storm," he declared. "Marse Frank he look out fo' dat."

"Well," said the villain, curtly, "then you will agree if I spare your life to talk with your master in my favor?"

"Yes," agreed Pomp, readily, "I jes' do dat, sah, an' I fink as how as Marse Frank only jes' cares fo' to break up yo' gang of pirates an' no mo', sah. I don't fink he wants fo' to kill yo', sah, nor any other man."

"Good!" cried Wing Ho, with a peculiar sinister smile. "Well, we will wait for daylight, and then we will make terms with Mr. Frank Reade, Jr."

With the coming of daylight Pomp was led up through a passage to the face of the cliff. Here he stood as seen by those on the air-ship while covered by half a score of rifles in the mouth of the passage.

Barney was the first to meet Pomp, and the two friends embraced ardently.

"Shure, it's good fer sore eyes to luk upon yez wanst more, me gossoon," cried Barney, affusively. "I'm overj'ed to see yez."

Everybody crowded around Pomp, but he pushed them aside, and said hurriedly:

"I mus' see Marse Frank on berry important bizness."

"Well, Pomp," said Frank, coming forward.



Pomp hastily recited his adventures and told of the proposal of Wing Ho to surrender. Frank listened intently and his face cleared as he made ringing reply:

"Go back and tell Wing Ho that we will accept his terms of surrender. He must march all his men out here upon the cliff and compel them to lay down their arms."

These words were heard by Wing Ho, who was in the mouth of the passage at the moment. He instantly stepped out and said:

"I am glad you accept my terms, Mr. Reade. Being a countryman of mine, I felt sure I could throw myself upon your mercy."

"You can," replied Frank. "But you must march your men out and have them lay down their arms here upon the cliff."

"It shall be as you say!" declared Wing Ho, with a low bow.

He returned to the mouth of the passage.

Soon the pirates began to file out and draw up in double lines upon the brow of the cliff.

They laid their guns down upon the ground at their feet.

It was like the surrender of a vast army, and Frank felt that it was no light conquest he had made as legions of the pirates swarmed out of the cavern.

The voyagers of the Eclipse stood by the gangway and watched the scene.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed Squeers, who had been busy with his note-book. "There is no end to them."

So it would seem. The pirates still came swarming out of the passage like bees out of a hive.

They were drawn up in double line, and made a formidable array.

Frank had conversed with Prince Kong, and had decided to march the prisoners to Kiang Chu, when suddenly there was a most astounding turning of tables.

The cunning Wing Ho had conceived a most daring and adroit plan for the vanquishing of his enemies. Fully one hundred of the pirates were upon the cliff now, when suddenly Wing Ho brandished his sword and sprang in front of his men, yelling fierce orders.

Before Frank Reade, Jr., or any of the voyagers of the Eclipse had fairly time to grasp the situation, the pirates had picked up their arms and made a tumultuous charge upon the air-ship.

Too late our friends saw the treachery of the move. In an instant they were in the grasp of the deadly foe. The pirates overwhelmed them and gained the deck of the air-ship.

In a twinkling the voyagers were prisoners and the Eclipse in the possession of Wing Ho and his pirate crew.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### IN THE POWER OF THE ENEMY.

So sudden had been the treacherous move of Wing Ho that our voyagers of the Eclipse had not even time to gain the deck of the air-ship.

They were overwhelmed and made prisoners in a twinkling.

With wild cheers the Chinese pirates surged aboard the air-ship and took possession. Into the cabin they rushed, and began to plunder and loot it, but suddenly Wing Ho's stern voice recalled them.

Every one of the air-ship's crew were bound hand and foot. Wing Ho stood by and watched the operation, the while speaking taunting words.

"Ha, ha! you thought to outwit Wing Ho!" he cried, jeeringly, "but you will find that an

impossibility. This time I am top of the heap, and I mean to keep there."

"I will admit that you seem to have the best of the situation just now," said Frank Reade, Jr., quietly, "but it is never impossible for tables to turn, you know, Mr. Chester Wing."

"Villainy will never prosper," declared Dr. Vaneyke, confidently. "You may kill us all and destroy the air-ship, but you will find out in the end that ruin and defeat will overtake you."

"Destroy the air-ship?" cried Wing Ho, with a triumphant flourish. "No, never! I mean that it shall be my vehicle of travel—my palace of the air. I will lay Hong Kong in ashes with the air-ship. First of all, I will make a hole in the ground where Fort Kiang Chu now stands."

Everybody looked aghast except Frank Reade, Jr. It certainly looked as if there was nothing at present to hinder the rascal from carrying out his purpose.

"Villain!" cried Squeers, excitedly. "You will never dare do such a thing!"

"Won't I?" cried the pirate chief, jubilantly.

"What is there to prevent me?"

"My soul!" gasped Prince Kong. "Cannot something be done to thwart the rascal's purpose?"

"May the Blissed Vargin preserve us!" cried Barney. "O! only wisht I had the use av me good arms, I'd make wan less vilyan in China afore tin seconds!"

"Golly!" cried Pomp, with dancing eyes. "Wouldn't I jes' like fo' to hab a little disruction wif de gemmen fo' about a minnit. I jes' bet my ole hat dat he nebber do sech a ting as dat, an' yo' kin jest gambol on it."

"Melican man play Chinee. Heap no goodee. Muchee bad man. Hangee up high, cuttee off neck. Killee quick," put in Sam Hop, with cheerful emphasis.

But the effect of all this was only to elate Wing Ho all the more, and he laughed most boisterously.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared. "What fine talk for the whole of yer. Why, confound it, I could have ye all hung as high as Haman in ten minutes if I wanted to. Ye'd better beg for mercy rather than defy me."

"Better death," said Dr. Vaneyke, scornfully.

"Amen!" said Caleb Squeers, resolutely.

"Oh! that is the way ye look at it, eh?" cried the villain, jeeringly. "Well, we'll test your courage and see how you can face death."

He turned and spoke to his men in Chinese. Then he pointed to Barney.

Instantly two stalwart Mongolians sprang forward and cut the Celt's bonds. In another instant the ranks of the Chinese guard split, making a long lane between them fully a yard wide.

It could be seen in a moment what was the purpose of the pirate chief. Barney was to be forced to run the gantlet.

Two long rows of Chinese pirates, full fifty feet long, were drawn up around with their swords. It was not likely that the victim could go twenty feet through that death line and Barney's fate seemed sealed.

It was like looking into the jaws of certain death to glance down that line bristling with short swords.

Aghast, the other prisoners watched the proceedings. But Barney was cool as could be, and when he went to the line to make the start, he actually winked at Frank Reade, Jr.

"May Heaven help you, Barney!" said Dr. Vaneyke, huskily.

"Never moind me a bit," said Barney, in a stage whisper. "I'll fool thim yit."

Wing Ho heard this and he turned with a mocking laugh.

"No power on earth can save ye," he said, jeeringly. "Say yer prayers, Irish."

"It's yesilf as will need to do that same afore ye die," retorted Barney. "An' if ye should pray all the rest av yer loife Saint Pether niver wud take yez into the gate yez kin be sure."

"Lead the prisoner up to the line," cried Wing Ho, savagely, in Chinese.

The order was quickly obeyed and Barney was led up to the starting line.

He stood facing the horrible line of death. It seemed as if his certain end was near at hand.

But the wary and quick-witted Celt had not been slow to size up the situation at its best, and accept the best chance for his life.

In his rear was the brow of the cliff, with the waters of the bay nearly two hundred feet below. Before him was certain death.

Frank Reade, Jr., averted his head. The great inventor felt faint and sick at heart. He could not see his faithful servitor go down to such a terrible death. The others were deeply affected.

Barney's bonds had been cut. He stood, freed from them and facing the gantlet line.

"Are ye ready?" cried Wing Ho.

"Yis, I'm ready," cried the brave Irishman. Then, quick as lightning he turned, and letting out with his fists knocked two of the pirates down like nine pins.

With a leap he sprang, not toward the lines of men, but the brow of the cliff.

The move was so sudden and unexpected that the pirates were dumfounded. Not one of them moved.

Straight toward the cliff's edge ran Barney. The next moment, to the surprise and horror of all, the daring Irishman leaped over the verge and went out of sight in a twinkling.

Then the pirates were aroused. With hoarse cries they rushed to the edge of the cliff and looked over.

Barney was not in sight anywhere.

Of course he must have struck the water before the spectators reached the verge of the cliff. But if he had come up again, he was not now in sight.

The voyagers of the Eclipse were all thrilled with a wild hope that Barney had survived the fall into the water.

But Wing Ho, with savage glee, yelled:

"That was a suicidal leap! He's done for. Now for the next one!"

"I pray Heaven Barney will escape with his life," muttered Dr. Vaneyke.

"He will!" declared Caleb Squeers, confidently. "I am sure of it."

"If he does, perhaps he will be able to effect our rescue," said Prince Kong, hopefully. "He will likely go to Kiang Chu and get a force of men to help him."

But Frank Reade, Jr., shook his head. The outlook to him was dubious indeed.

They were all in the power of the unscrupulous villain, Wing Ho. He might at any moment order them to be massacred.

Indeed, this seemed to be the villain's purpose. Frank divined it in the expression of his face, and stepping forward he said in a full voice:

"Chester Wing, you have us all at your mercy. The air-ship truly is in your possession, but remember that it will never be of any service to you if you kill us."

"Why?" asked the villain.



"A simple reason. You do not know the secret of operating it."

A cloud came over the villain's face.

"You shall tell me," he hissed, "or you shall die."

"Will you spare the lives of us all if I will teach you how to work the air-ship?" asked Frank, quietly.

A cunning light shone in Wing Ho's eyes.

"I will," he said, suddenly. "Show me the secret of the air-ship and you shall all be given your lives."

"Come aboard the air-ship, then," said Frank, quietly. "Cut our bonds and set us free."

"Easy!" exclaimed the villain, with a cunning leer. "I'll set ye free only after ye've shown me the secret of the air-ship."

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### THE TRICKSTER OUTTRICKED.

WING HO evidently feared a sharp game upon Frank's part. The famous inventor could not help a smile.

"As you please," he said, coolly. "Kill us all, then, and go without the secret."

A sudden evil light emanated from Wing Ho's eyes as an idea seemed to strike him.

"Will I?" he cried, jeeringly. "We'll see about that, my fine inventor. Ye shall know that I am master an' if I choose I can force ye to show me the workings of the air-ship."

"That is out of the question," replied Frank, firmly. "No threats of death can force me to do that."

"We will see!" cried the pirate chief, savagely. Then in Chinese: "men, take the other prisoners into the cavern below and hold them under close guard."

Instantly two lines of guards led the prisoners into the entrance to the cavern. In a few moments they had filed out of sight.

Frank Reade, Jr., was left with Wing Ho and a score of the pirates. The pirate chief gave orders to his men, who seized hold of Frank and began to drag him toward the air-ship.

Over the rail he was carried and onto the deck. Then Wing Ho drew a pistol and said in a grating voice:

"Will ye show me the secret of the air-ship or will ye die?"

While all this had been going on Frank's brain had been active devising a plan of action. Like a flash an inspiration had come to him.

Steadying his nerves as best he could he made reply quietly:

"Life is dear to every one. Upon the condition that you will spare the lives of my friends I will show you how to make the air-ship rise."

"All right," cried the villain, eagerly. "I'll agree to that."

"Then call them back."

"Who?"

"My friends."

"What for?" asked the pirate chief.

"I want them aboard the air-ship to show your good faith."

But Wing Ho shrugged his shoulders.

"No, no," he declared. "I'll not agree to that. But they shall be set free after you have showed me how to work the air-ship."

"How am I to know that?" asked Frank.

"I give you my word."

"Humph!" declared the famous inventor, "I decline to take it."

Wing Ho's face turned purple with wrath.

"You do, eh?" he hissed. "Well, those are my only terms. Take 'em or not as you choose. Before I'll give in to anything further I'll have the whole gang of ye executed, and tear the air-ship all to pieces."

"Very well," said Frank, coldly. "Just as you please."

The pirate chief was silent a moment. He glanced at the young inventor in a covert way, as if to try and fathom whether he was playing a game of bluff or not.

This was really what Frank was doing, but, of course, he did not care to make it evident.

Wing Ho, however, was astute enough to divine this fact. He turned to his men, and cried in Chinese:

"Stand the prisoner up against the rail by the cabin there. Measure off ten paces, and shoot him."

The order was obeyed in part with alacrity. Frank was led to the position by the rail. The guard retired ten paces, and began to unsling their carbines.

The famous inventor knew that it was a critical moment. The whimsical villain, Wing Ho, might take it into his head at any moment to direct his men to fire.

Frank glanced about him quickly and decided upon an instant and daring move.

He was not ten feet from the door of the pilot-house. He was free of his bonds and had the full use of his limbs. With him to think was to act.

The carbines were partly unslung from the shoulders. There was not a second to lose. Quick as a flash Frank made a sudden side leap and darted into the pilot-house.

Crack!

Wing Ho's revolver cracked. The bullet struck the jamb of the door. It being of steel the lead simply flattened there doing no harm.

"Seize him! seize him!" yelled the infuriated pirate leader.

The pirates rushed toward the pilot-house door, but quick as a flash Frank shut it in their faces and barred it. Then with a swift movement he turned Lever No. 7.

In an instant the air-ship shot up into the air. Up, up it went until a thousand feet high.

For an instant both Wing Ho and the guard paused in amazement. It was a new experience for the pirates and they were terror-stricken.

Rushing to the rail, several of them appeared about to throw themselves overboard. It was Frank's opportunity.

With a swift movement he turned a small thumb-screw, which brought into contact a live wire from the dynamo and a wire connecting with the rail. In an instant the rail was charged.

The effect was startling. With the force of the current sent through the metal rail, those who were in contact with it were hurled violently to the deck.

Stunned and startled beyond measure, they scrambled to their feet with yells of terror.

Then, unable to unfathom the mystery and shivering with terror, they huddled together about amidships with chattering teeth and trembling.

Wing Ho even was a victim of the same feeling of fright. The mysterious, invisible and deadly force of electricity was something far beyond their power to grapple with.

There was little wonder that they were fright struck. Ignorant fellows that they were, benighted heathens of the lowest type, all the strong superstitious element of their nature was appealed to most strongly.

"Curses on ye, wizard!" yelled the infuriated pirate chief, "I don't know what kind of a devil's power ye have, but if ye don't come out of there and give yerself up, I'll have your life!"

"You had better try to come in here, Chester Wing!" cried Frank, defiantly. "It will be the worst task you ever undertook. The tables are turned, my fine villain, and I have the upper hand at present."

"We'll see whether they've turned or not," gritted the villain with a mad yell.

He made a rush and threw his weight against the pilot-house door. Luckless fellow!

Frank had charged the steel door with electricity, anticipating attack upon it. The result was that Wing Ho experienced a sensation like that of being kicked by a score of mules.

He was flung half across the deck, and with such force that he lay unconscious. Then Frank opened the door of the pilot-house and ran boldly out upon deck.

He seized Wing Ho by the heels and dragged him back into the pilot-house. Not one of the terrified pirates made a move to prevent.

Shutting the pilot-house door, Frank quickly bound Wing Ho hand and foot. His enemy was *hors du combat* and was his prisoner.

It was certainly a triumphant victory for the famous inventor, and he had good reason to feel jubilant. He had decided upon a plan of action and immediately reversed Lever No. 7, and the air-ship began to descend.

Frank selected a hillside as a good landing place. The air-ship settled down and rested upon the ground.

Then Frank threw open the pilot-house door, and with comprehensive gestures to enforce his words, cried to the terrified Mongolians:

"Be off, every one of you, or you shall die. Leave the air-ship—lively!"

For a moment the pirates hesitated. Then as the meaning of Frank Reade, Jr., became plainer to them, they made a break for the rail.

Frank had discharged the current from the rail and the pirates easily passed from the deck to the ground.

But there they suddenly halted. It was as if they had suddenly bethought themselves of their leader. Frank saw the move, but before he could withdraw into the pilot-house the crack of a pistol sounded upon the air.

Frank Reade, Jr., with a gasping cry, sank in a heap in the pilot-house doorway. With a wild yell of triumph the pirate crew started to rush back upon the air-ship's deck.

## CHAPTER XLV.

### BARNEY USES HIS FISTS.

BUT what of the fate of brave Barney, who took the daring leap from the cliff? Did he go to his death, or was his life spared?

It is a pleasure to write that the latter was the case.

The daring Irishman shot down through space like a rock out of a catapult. But he knew well the secret of leaping from great heights into water.

Involuntarily he placed his hands by his side and stiffened his body. He struck the water feet foremost, and went to the bottom with a slight concussion.

For a moment he was stunned, but he came quickly to the surface and instantly dove again. He was not twenty yards from the shore.

By means of repeated dives he avoided being seen by any one in the cavern.

Barney was a fine swimmer, and striking out, he very soon reached the shore.

The bold Hibernian crawled out of the water and instantly struck out into the interior. He knew well that the shores of the little bay



were infested with pirates, and a moment's lingering there might mean recapture.

Liberty was a vital matter just now, not only to him but to his friends. He must rescue them in some manner. He felt that their lives depended upon him.

Even in that moment Barney had conceived the idea of going to Kiang Chu for troops.

In the crippled state of the pirate stronghold it would seem an easy matter for the emperor's troops to easily win a victory and capture the whole gang. Barney believed this was the proper move to make and the time to strike.

But neither seemed to be armed. Barney noted this fact and seemed re-assured. Involuntarily he began to roll up his sleeves.

There was no way to avoid the meeting. The walls of the pass were high and steep. Barney knew that it would never do to go back. There was but one way, and this was to go ahead and risk an encounter.

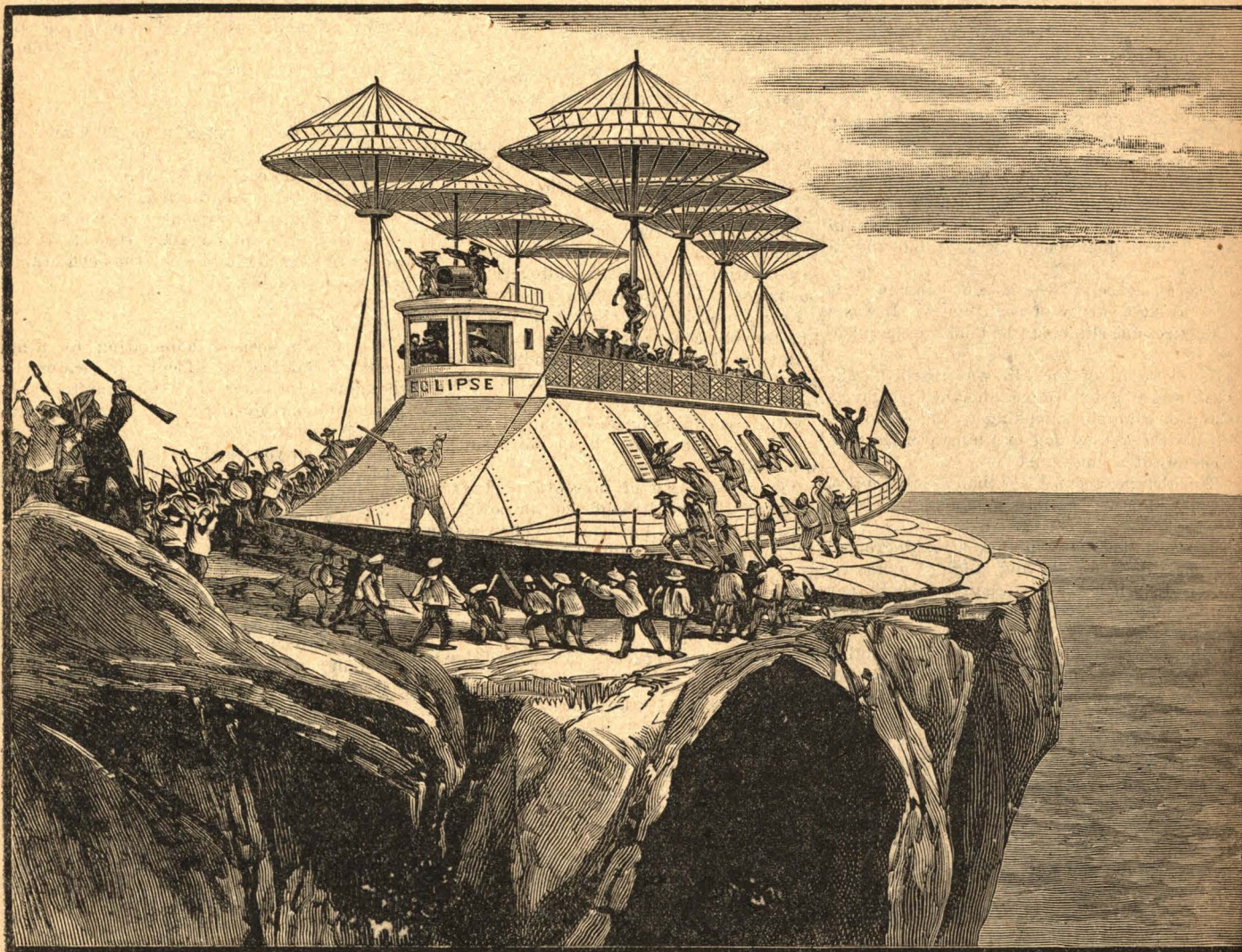
The Irishman paused, watching his foes in a wary manner.

The Chinese began to talk and finally addressed Barney threateningly in their tongue.

tered. "Well, I'll kape up the reputation of me own country, Fermanagh, as shure as me name is Barney O'Shea. Whurrool ye wild haythins, cum on an' I'll break the faces av yez."

The Mongolians were coming on. The next moment they made a rush at Barney. The Celt was an expert boxer. This was just the opportunity he wanted.

He dodged the attack and let out with his right fist with lightning rapidity. He struck one of the big brutes just back of the ear and he dropped like a log.



'Too late our friends saw the treachery of the move. In an instant they were in the grasp of the deadly foe. The pirates overwhelmed them and gained the deck of the air-ship. In a twinkling the voyagers were prisoners and the Eclipse in the possession of Wing Ho and his pirate crew.

If done promptly it was possible that his friends might be saved. The Celt was determined to at once strike for Kiang Chu.

He had but a vague idea as to where the fort was. Yet he believed he could find it. The distance was great, but Barney was not considering obstacles.

It was a case of necessity. Up the steep bluff he climbed, and had reached a narrow defile leading to the open country, when a thrilling thing occurred.

From behind a huge pile of rocks two burly Chinese pirates stepped forth.

They blocked his path completely. There was a grin upon the face of each, and it was evident that they considered him their prey.

Barney paused aghast. The odds were by no means favorable, as the two villains were heavy and strong built.

Of course the Celt could not understand, but he replied:

"Whisht, away wid yez! I'm a respectable, law-abiding citizen, an' it's meself as only wants to go an me way unmolested. Be so kind as to sthand out av me path."

Of course the Mongolians did not understand him, and only continued their jabbering and gesticulations. This aroused Barney's ire, and he sang out:

"Shaure, an' howiver do yez suppose I kin undershtand sich talk as that? Bejabbers I'll give yez one minnit to shtand out av me way or I'll show yez what kind of foighters the O'Sheas are."

The Mongolians now seemed to have reached an agreement and advanced toward him threateningly. Barney watched them like a cat.

"Shaure, an' it's a ruction I'm in for," he mut-

A Chinaman is never a match in fisticuffs with a live Irishman. The other Mongolian rushed at Barney and got a tap on the nose which drew the claret.

This only maddened the heathen all the more and he rushed at Barney more blindly and furiously than ever.

The result was that his left optic was almost instantly closed, and he received a stunning blow in the temple and one over his left lung which took his wind.

The lively Celt danced around him like a dervish, and the bulky Chinaman could not get hold of him. It was a laughable conflict.

"There's another for ould Ireland," shouted Barney, putting in another blow. "An' there's another for luck. An' here's wan fer yer mither, an' here's the devil's luck to yez, ye no good haythin."



Barney was having rare sport. It was only fun for him to polish off the unscientific Mongolian, who at close quarters would have been giant enough to have squeezed him to death.

The result was that the Mongolian was completely knocked out and sank half insensible upon the ground. Barney was the exultant victor.

"Don't yez iver thry to do up an Irishman agin until yez have learned how to use yer flns, Chinayser," cried Barney, tauntingly. "Av yez iver want more satisfaction, jist come over to Ameriky an' I'll be glad to do yez the same favor at any time."

But the other Chinaman was now coming to, and, moreover, at the lower end of the defile Barney saw several more of the foe coming.

It was clearly time to get out, and the Hibernian having now a clear course before him, proceeded to do so. He started for the open country beyond as fast as his legs could carry him.

This time he met with no obstacles. Soon he felt safe from pursuit. He kept on for some hours, until he came to the foot of a high hill which was uncrowned by anything like a forest.

Barney conceived the idea of climbing this and taking a survey of the country. It was a long, tiresome climb, but he finally accomplished it.

The summit of the hill was reached. The view was an extended one and the Celt gave a shout of triumph as, looking to the eastward, he saw the yellow flag of China over the pallisade fort of Kiang Chu.

The distance seemed less than a dozen miles. Barney took his bearings and made a bee-line for the fort.

It was a long, hard climb over rough ground, through deep forests and mighty morasses. But at length as the day began to wane Barney came out upon level ground not one hundred yards from the fort.

Guards were pacing the parapet. The roll of a drum was heard within the fort. Barney made a rush for the fort, waving his arms.

"Whurroo!" he shouted. "Call out the major-gineral an' all av the military. Now is the toime to foight the pirates an' bate thim."

His cries caused the guards to give the alarm, and the next moment out of the fort rushed a young man with pallid face and disheveled appearance.

It was Will Deane. He rushed up to Barney, crying:

"Barney—it's you, eh? Where is the air-ship?"

"Mercy presarve us!" cried the breathless Celt, "but the omadhans av pirates have captured the whole av thim, an' I've only escaped with me loife."

Barney hurriedly told his story. Will Deane listened with horror.

"Of course, the commander, Li Ching, will send the troops at once!" he declared; "but my soul! I've bad news also, Barney."

"The devil ye say!" gasped the Celt. "Phwat iver may it be?"

"Some miserable wretches have abducted Myrtle, and though we have scoured the country, we can find no trace of her and fear she is dead!"

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### THE CUNNING OF A VILLAIN.

It seemed that with the firing of that shot Frank Reade, Jr., must be either dead or badly wounded, and that the pirates would again gain possession of the air-ship.

The famous inventor had sank down all in a

heap. Blood covered his face and he seemed dying.

The pirates had nearly reached the rail. Wing Ho, who was lying bound in the pilot-house, had come to and gave a yell of encouragement to his men.

But a kind of fate had decreed that Frank Reade, Jr.'s career was not to be thus untimely ended.

The faintness he overcame by a mighty effort of the will. The bullet had grazed his skull, merely producing a concussion—nothing more.

Seeing the deadly peril menacing him, he sprang up and pressed one of the lever keys. Instantly the air-ship's rail was again charged with electricity.

The pirates, thinking to once more get the air-ship into their possession, sprang for the rail.

The next moment they heartily wished that they hadn't. The strange and deadly force which they could not understand hurled them back like puppets.

They were scattered in all directions, and some of them did not escape without quite serious injuries. It was not altogether a serious incident, but ludicrous in the extreme.

Even Frank himself, though his head pained him terribly, could not help but laugh.

But the pirate leader, bound and lying on the pilot-house floor, burst out with a series of terrific oaths.

"Curse ye, Frank Reade," he hissed, savagely, "ye've got ther upper hand now, but luck won't always be with ye."

"It is with me at present," said Frank, coolly; "that is quite sufficient for now."

"Jest wait until I git you in my power agin."

"That will never happen," said the famous inventor, decidedly.

The pirate's face was ashen hued.

"Why?" he asked, sharply.

"You will not live until that time."

"What? Ye don't mean to kill me?" gasped the villain.

"Why should I spare you?" asked Frank, sternly.

"But it would be murder!"

"Murder!" cried Frank, scornfully. "It would be a blessing upon mankind in general. The world would be rid of a fiend in human shape."

That the villain was a coward it was plain to see. He trembled like a veritable aspen leaf.

"Spare me!" he whined. "I will do anything you ask—only spare my life!"

Frank had been engaged in bathing the wound upon his head. As the villain made this last statement, swift as a flash an idea occurred to him.

He tied a bandage quickly about his head and stepped to the pilot-house window.

The discomfited Chinese pirates had retired a distance of one hundred yards, and were regarding the air-ship at a safe distance.

They did not dare to attack the Eclipse again.

One repulse like the last one was quite sufficient for them. They did not care to risk another.

Yet they were solicitous as to the fate of their chief.

Wing Ho could see them through the pilot-house door, and he began to rave and curse at them in the Chinese tongue.

"Curse ye!" he roared, savagely. "Why don't ye come to my rescue? What are ye standing there for like a lot of sticks? Hain't

ye got any grit at all? Come on, an' make a break for it an' ye'll win."

But this exhortation could not overcome the wholesome fear and aversion experienced by the gang.

They replied to him in Chinese, which only made the brute more furious.

Frank had thought of sending a bomb into the crew and blowing some of them up, but he refrained for a certain politic reason which had occurred to him.

He turned to the bound and helpless villain upon the floor and said:

"Chester Wing, you don't want to die, I know. You have as great a love of life as ever."

"What do you mean?" growled the villain, with a shrewd glitter in his eyes.

"Just what I say!"

"An' what's that?"

"If you'll do one thing for me I'll spare your life."

Wing gazed keenly at Frank.

"What?" he asked, tersely.

"My friends are prisoners of yours. You must liberate them and allow them to return on board this air-ship. On that condition I will spare your life."

"Ye will, eh?"

"Yes."

The villain seemed deliberating for a moment. Frank had no difficulty in reading his thoughts. He knew that the cunning rascal was simply meditating a safe plan to circumvent his captor.

"What do you say?" asked Frank, tersely. "I have no time to fool away."

"I'll not do it!"

"You won't?"

"No."

"We shall see!"

Frank took up a wire from the lever bench. He bent one end of it between the discs of the electric conductors. Then he donned some insulated gloves and held one end of the wire in proximity to the soles of the villain's feet.

He turned on the current. A yell like one gone mad came from Wing Ho's lips as the wire gave him a shock.

Three times Frank gave the villain this sort of a douche and then said very quietly:

"Will you come to my terms now?"

"I'll do it, if—if—"

"No equivocation. You know my terms. I will not change them a particle."

Once more the wire was held up to the villain's agonized gaze and he yelled:

"Y—yes! I'll do anything."

"All right."

Frank laid the wire on the bench. The villain was quite humble now.

"What do yer want me to do?"

"I told you. I want you to set free my friends."

"All right!" said the villain, a light breaking across his face. "Jest cut my hands an' feet free, and I'll go down in the cavern an' have 'em brought right up."

"No, you won't," said Frank, steadily. "You can't play that kind of a game on me."

"But what do ye want me to do?"

"Your men are in earshot out there. Speak to them and order them to go down and get the prisoners. Their bonds must be cut and they must be allowed to walk safely aboard the air-ship. Then I will cut your bonds and set you free."

The villain scowled deeply.

"But that ain't a fair deal," he growled. "Is your word any better than mine? Ye won't trust me to go down an' set them free, an' yet



ye want me to trust you until ye get yer friends on board. Ye might tell me to whistle for it then."

"I am not that kind of a man, Chester Wing," said Frank, sternly. "And you know it. You must trust me. You are in my power, anyway. If not, I will take you to Hong Kong and deliver you up to the authorities there. You know what sort of a fate it will be to fall into the hands of the Chinese emperor?"

Wing Ho shivered. This was a shot which told.

He drew a deep breath, and said:

"Ye'll give me yer sacred word of honor that ye'll do ther fair thing by me?"

"I do," said Frank.

"All right. It's a bargain, then."

The villain partly turned himself upon his side, and shouted to his men in the Chinese tongue.

As he did so he experienced a thrilling shock. He felt the bonds which bound his wrists behind him suddenly loosen and one of his hands slipped out.

In an instant a daring move occurred to his desperate mind.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### A MIGHTY ALTITUDE.

WING HO's hands were certainly free. A devilish delight seized the villain.

Of course Frank Reade, Jr., never dreamed of this, and as he was watching the Mongolians outside his gaze was averted.

Upon the bench lay a knife. As the daring villain began his palaver with the Mongolians, his right hand went up and seized this.

One slash at the rope which bound his feet and he was free.

Frank Reade, Jr., turned just in time to see his foe about to spring to his feet with the deadly knife in his hand.

The famous inventor's astonishment and dismay can be more easily imagined than described.

"Ha, ha!" shrieked Wing Ho, rushing upon Frank Reade, Jr., like a fury. "The tables have turned as I warned ye. Ther game is mine. Die, ye fool!"

Just in time Frank threw up his right arm and caught the wrist of the hand which held the knife.

A deadly struggle followed.

Of course, this was seen by the Mongolians outside. The effect upon them was electrical.

They began to dance and yell furiously. Several of them once more ventured to attempt the rail, but were forced back in dismay by the electric current.

Frank Reade, Jr., had been placed in many a thrilling position during his eventful career.

But never in his life had he experienced such a struggle as that which he now had with Wing Ho.

Frank was light, but extremely supple and wiry, and, moreover, used a great deal of head work in wrestling. The struggle was hand to hand and close.

Now one was up, and then down, and for a time neither held a great advantage.

Wing Ho was the heaviest and strongest, but Frank was the most skillful and scientific. The young inventor resorted to every possible trick to down his opponent.

Wing Ho cursed in a frightful manner, and tried to use the knife upon his antagonist.

But Frank twisted his wrist so violently that he finally compelled him to drop it. The struggle then became a mere question of physical endurance and superiority.

Round and round the pilot-house they whirled. Against the partition and over the benches they went. Frank suddenly tripped and went down.

Wing Ho imagined that he now had his foe at a disadvantage, and a yell of triumph escaped his lips.

But Frank exerted all his strength, and by a dexterous trip of the foot threw the pirate chief also. Together, locked in each other's arms, they rolled about the pilot-house floor.

Outside the Mongolians were watching the struggle intently, yelling and cheering wildly. But they did not venture to cross the bewitched rail.

How the affair would have terminated, had it not been for a sudden happening which suddenly put a new face upon the matters, it is hard to say.

In whirling about the pilot-house, Wing Ho's shoulder struck one of the lever bars.

In an instant it was switched, and sparks began to fly from the discs. There was a quick shock, and the whir of the rotascopes outside could be heard.

The air-ship had suddenly sprang up from the earth like a huge bird, and was shooting up through space with meteoric rapidity.

Frank realized this at once and experienced a queer thrill.

He knew that the rotascopes were literally flying at full speed and that at this rate the air-ship would speedily attain a frightful altitude.

And he was powerless himself to remedy the evil.

Fiercely the two foes were struggling now in one corner of the pilot-house. The air-ship swayed and rocked beneath the tremendous speed of the rotascopes.

Of course every moment the air became rarer. Frank felt it and knew what it meant.

Beyond a certain altitude life could not be maintained. There was every reason to believe that the air-ship was speedily gaining that height.

The air began to grow frightfully cold. Almost in an instant's time moisture on the glass windows began to congeal into white frost.

Wing Ho, in spite of the earnestness of the struggle, experienced the effects of this wonderful change and was astounded. He involuntarily glanced over his shoulder, and for the first time saw the rotascopes revolving and knew that they were shooting up into space.

The effect upon him was demoralizing. He wavered and seemed to lose his grip.

It was Frank's opportunity.

He exerted his strength and threw the villain heavily.

In falling, Wing Ho struck fairly upon his back, and there the young inventor held him firmly.

In vain the pirate chief endeavored to break that hold.

Frank had got the right sort of a purchase, and he held his enemy tightly. But though he had his enemy down, he was almost in as bad a position, for he could not free himself from the grip which Wing Ho had upon him.

There the two combatants were, each holding tightly to the other.

It was a somewhat ludicrous although very desperate situation.

Frank tried in vain to break his foe's hold. But this he was unable to do.

Wing Ho, seeing that this was his only point of vantage now, held on with a death-like determination. Thus they lay, glaring at each other.

And every moment the air-ship was shooting up into space. Every moment the air was becoming colder and more and more unbearable.

The breath of each came short and quick. Indeed, they were almost gasping for want of good air.

Wing Ho glared savagely at his foe who held him tightly.

"Curse ye!" gritted the villain. "Let go of me!"

"Not if I know it," replied Frank, coolly. "That is too much of a favor to grant. Give up, Chester Wing. You know well enough that I am top of the heap."

"I know that yer can't get away no more nor I can."

"Then why don't you surrender?"

"Why should I, any more than you?" sneered the villain.

"Because my chances are better than yours," replied Frank.

"Are they?"

"Yes."

"I don't think so."

"Well, I do," replied the young inventor, confidently. "You are not as well used to rarefied air as I am."

Wing Ho turned a shade paler.

"What do you mean?" he gritted.

"I mean that you are nearer heaven now than you ever will be again. We must be many thousand feet from the earth."

"What!" gritted the villain, evincing terror. "Is that what makes it so all-fired cold?"

"Yes."

"An' can't we breathe in this kind of air?"

"Not very long."

Wing Ho was already gasping. Frank did not mind the change so much. The cold was stiffening their very joints, so intense was it. Frank felt his flesh slowly freezing.

"I cavel!" gasped Wing Ho, suddenly relaxing his grip upon Frank Reade, Jr. "Let—the air-ship go—down—quick—ugh!"

The villain fell back in an inanimate heap. Frank Reade tried to gain his feet, but Wing Ho's right hand yet clutched his wrist. He tried to free it but could not. It was like a death-grip.

And every moment he felt his breath leaving his body in that rarefied atmosphere. Great heavens! would he free himself in time to reverse Lever No. 7?

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### THE ATTACK.

BARNEY listened to the declaration of Will Deane with a thrill of horror.

"Phwat's that yez say?" he gasped. "The devils 'av' sthole Miss Myrtle away? Well, be me sowl, I'm thinkin' it was a bad day whiniver we came into this haythin country!"

The gate of the fort opened now, and out came the others of the Daisy's party—Mortimer Osborne and Jack Clark.

They were followed by the commandant and quite a number of the Chinese garrison. Barney's story was interpreted and the greatest excitement prevailed.

"Of course we will go to their rescue!" cried Li Ching, the commandant, in his own tongue. "Muster five hundred armed men. It is near sunset, it is true, but we must make the start at once."

The commandant's orders were quickly obeyed. With the roll of the Chinese drum the men filed out, and were drawn up on parade and inspected.

Then officers were given their instructions,



and Barney was deputized to lead the way to the pirate cabin.

Will Deane, Jack Clark and Mortimer Osborne walked by Barney's side as the small army set out on the march.

For a time it was hard climbing through the rough, swampy country, but ten miles was accomplished before it became too dark to proceed further.

Then a camp was made, sentries posted, and all the precautions usually employed by a marching army in an enemy's territory were adopted.

The three youths of the Daisy's party and Barney camped by themselves at the foot of a large oak. They sat up most all night discussing the situation in its entirety.

"Bejabers, it's me private notion that if we strike the omadhouns roight now we kin whip thim out av their boots," cried Barney, confidently.

"Why do you feel so sure of that, Barney?" asked Will Deane.

"Bekase the thaves have jist had a tremenjous good bating from Misther Frank an' nearly all av their ships 'av' been blowed up by the air-ship, and I don't belave there's many a wan av thim as wants very much to foight, bad cess to thim!"

"There is certainly logic in what Barney says," declared Jack Clark, positively. "Very likely the foe are in quite a demoralized condition, and, of course, would be easier to whip."

"The question seems to me one of numbers," said Mortimer. "I notice that in Chinese warfare numbers counts for half the battle."

"That is true," cried Will Deane. "Numbers has more to do with deciding a battle than position."

Jack Clark began to pace up and down. His handsome face was wan and haggard.

"Oh, if we can only rescue Myrtle!" he groaned, in a despairing way. "But I fear—oh, I fear that we shall never see her in life again!"

"Ah, now, don't take on loike that now," cried Barney, cheerily. "Ther fust thing yez knows she'll pop up all roight and happy agin. The spalpeens won't hurt her, for, be me sowl, it's a ransom they'll be afther thyrin' for to git."

"And Barney is right," cried Will Deane, cheerily. "Come, pards, cheer up. You'll find that Myrtle will turn up all right yet. We will surely find her."

"God grant it may be so," groaned Mortimer Osborne, "but I fear that I shall never see my sister again."

Mortimer and Clark were thus despondent. It was quite useless to attempt to reason with them. They could not view the matter in a cheerful light.

The night passed without moment. The next morning at an early hour the little army was again in motion.

But they had just emerged from the region of swamps to meet with an unlooked-for and hot reception.

In climbing an eminence, suddenly a shower of bullets came sweeping down into their ranks, killing quite a number of men and creating momentary confusion.

But a few stern orders from the officers restored order. In a moment the lines broke and deployed right and left.

The enemy had shown his position to be on a little hill commanding the swamp tract. The number of the foes could not be half a hundred.

Of course such a small force as this could not for long obstruct the path of the five hundred

armed soldiers. A charge was made up the hill and they were routed.

But this little encounter was a warning for the invading party to be on their guard.

They were in the enemy's country, and the foe were all about them. Promptness of movement and quick action were what was needed, as well as caution and some strategy.

This little skirmish had its beneficial effect.

It clearly proved that the enemy had not by any means as yet lost their strength, and that great care must be exercised. An advance skirmish line was thrown out, and the march was resumed.

For a time nothing further was seen of the foe. Then suddenly the skirmish line was heard having quite a hot fight.

But the cliffs of the pirate stronghold were now in sight. One of the big junks which had escaped the air-ship's bombs had just come out of the cavern.

Its guns were trained to cover the heights, and suddenly it began to throw shells over the heights and into the thick woods where the attacking party were.

"Bejabers!" cried Barney, as he narrowly escaped going up in one of the terrific explosions caused by these shells, "if I sthay around here it's a dead Irishman yez will be afther findin', I'm thinkin'. Ah, bejabers, if only Misther Frank wud come along now."

Mortimer and Will Deane, Jack Clark and Barney all sought the shelter of a ridge near and watched the skirmish of the Chinese troops with the pirates.

It was plain that the troops were determined to whip the pirates this time, or die in the attempt. They certainly had evinced great pluck thus far.

But Barney was thinking of the prisoners in the pirates' cave. He was filled with many desperate plans of rescue.

He even thought of leading the troops to the underground passage by which some of the prisoners once escaped. But he suddenly remembered that this had been closed by caving in.

"Bejabers, there's no other way but to foight our way roight into the stronghold av ther bloody Chinaysers," he growled. "If I was an officer in that company, the first thing I'd do, I'd just sail roight into the devils, an' I'd win the ruction or I'd go home with my head done up in Yankee shin-plasters."

Everybody laughed at this. But the firing now had become lively.

A large sized battle between the pirates and the soldiers was certainly on. The troops were crowding for the little pass which led down to the shores of the bay.

But the pirates stubbornly contested the way. Amassed in large numbers and having always the advantage of protection, they could make a bold stand.

"Bad cess to thim," cried Barney, suddenly. "Frinds, it's not roight to see a good Irishman loike me sthay away from the foight, whin it's well known that I kin whip four Chinaysers every toime. Jist give me a bit of a gude shillalah an' Barney ain't afeard of ther hull nation of Chinaysers!"

"Right!" cried Jack Clark. "There is no reason why we should shun the fight. Come on, boys, let's give a helping hand."

A few moments later the Americans were in the foremost line of skirmishers. From their position they had a good view of the sandy strip of beach around the cave and leading into the cavern.

The pirates were congregated at points along

the shore and were concealed by rocks. The junk's guns were booming, and altogether a large-sized battle was in progress.

"Whurroo! bad cess to thim. We kin whip thim! Ould Ireland forever!" cried Barney.

Then he came to a sudden pause, and a great cry of amazement escaped his lips as he pointed to the entrance to the harbor.

#### CHAPTER XLIX.

##### DOWN FROM THE ZENITH.

FRANK READE, JR., had withstood the rarefied atmosphere much better than Wing Ho. He was more accustomed to it, which easily explained this.

Wing Ho had dropped back inanimate and to all appearance dead. Frank knew there was no time to lose. His own strength was leaving him.

The air-ship was still shooting upward. At a certain altitude life could not be supported for even a moment.

Frank Reade, Jr., knew this well enough. He realized the deadly risk and knew how to avert it.

He had sprung forward to reverse Lever No. 7. A deadly faintness was upon him, and he could not see the lever switch.

But he knew it by the sense of touch; and instantly switched the current off. In an instant the air-ship lost momentum and then began to sink.

But Frank Reade, Jr., knew nothing of this. He had swooned.

The air-ship settled rapidly and gracefully. But it was at a frightful distance from the earth.

It was a long while before the earth came into sight.

But the air was once more mild and life-giving. The frost began to disappear rapidly from the metal work of the air-ship.

Down—down settled the air-ship, the rotascopes revolving only slowly.

Nearer the earth it drew every moment.

Now it was scarcely a thousand feet from the surface.

Down it still went, and now scarcely a hundred feet intervened.

A moment later it struck the earth and there rested. But as yet no sign of life had been manifested by the voyagers within.

The air-ship had alighted in the lonely valley in the heart of a mighty range of hills. How far this spot was from the place where they had started it was hard to estimate.

Frank Reade, Jr., had known nothing after turning the lever with the last atom of strength he had possessed.

His swoon had been a long one, and in some cases might have resulted in a fatal syncope.

But a strong constitution and a sound physical frame triumphed, and soon he began to show signs of returning consciousness.

After a time his eyes opened and he looked about him. Gradually a recollection of all came back to him.

He recalled that fearful trip up into the upper atmosphere, and that frightful struggle with Wing Ho.

He could not repress a shiver. He raised himself feebly upon his elbow and looked about him.

There lay Wing Ho in the corner apparently dead. Yet as Frank looked closer, he saw that the flushed face and full eyelids were unmistakable signs of life.

Frank was completely exhausted with his thrilling experience, and for a time was quite unable to move about.



Fortunately a bottle of stimulant was upon a shelf near. He crept to it and imbibed some of its contents.

This revived him very much, and enabled him to stand on his feet.

He staggered out upon deck and looked about him.

The air-ship rested securely upon level ground in the very heart of the lonely valley. Not a sign of human habitation was near.

Darkness was coming on rapidly. Frank quickly made up his mind as to a plan of action.

He returned to the pilot-house and bent down over Wing Ho. Straightening the villain's form out, Frank began work to resuscitate him.

This was not a difficult task. In a few moments he began to show signs of returning consciousness. Frank now took the precaution to again bind him, and this time more securely.

Presently Wing Ho opened his eyes and looked about him. His gaze rested upon Frank blankly for a moment. Then a light of comprehension burst over him, and he gasped:

"Where are we? Ye don't mean to tell me that this is hades?"

"Not yet," said Frank, with a smile. "You are given a little more respite, Chester Wing. But I have no doubt you will get there in time."

"Eh? By the great dragon!" gasped the villain, looking about him, "we're on earth again. The last thing I remember, we were dying, and at an awful height in the air."

"So we were now!" replied Frank, "but fortunately I managed to summon strength enough to reverse the air-ship's engines and we came down. We are on earth once more and you are in a fair way to expiate your crimes in the manner you deserve!"

A hiss escaped the villain's lips. He writhed in his bonds.

"Oh, I'll trip you up yet, Frank Reade!" he gritted malevolently. "I'm not hung yet an' Satan will help me out of this scrape. He has stood by me well so far."

Frank picked up a cushion and some blankets which he had brought from the cabin. These he placed beneath the prisoner.

Then he drew some wires across that corner of the room and connected them with the wire which came from the dynamos. The current sent through them was a powerful one.

"There, Mr. Chester Wing," he said, quietly, "I would advise you not to move from your position to-night. So long as you remain quiet you will rest comfortably, but if you attempt to escape you will get the worst of it. Touch one of those wires and you will wish that you hadn't directly."

Wing glared at Frank savagely but made no comment.

Then Frank closed the pilot-house door and retired to the cabin.

He did not fear any invasion from a foe in that deserted locality. The rail and steel hull of the air-ship was heavily charged and an invader would be apt to get the worst of it.

The famous inventor was extremely worn out and exhausted, and felt the need of sleep. So he retired at once to his couch and gave himself up to slumber.

The night passed uneventfully. The next morning Frank awoke much refreshed.

He had formed a definite plan of action. His great desire now was to rescue his fellow voyagers from the pirates.

How to do this single-handed was a conundrum. Yet Frank was bound to admit that he had the best of the situation, for Wing Ho, the pirate leader, was in his power.

The pirates could hardly make a move of any

importance without the advice of their leader. It was not at all likely that the prisoners would be harmed at present.

Yet it was very necessary that their rescue be quickly effected. Frank decided to go at once to Kiang Chu, get reinforcements, and make a descent upon the pirates' den.

It certainly looked plausible for the place to be easily destroyed if attacked by the emperor's soldiers with the aid of the air-ship.

"I will do it," muttered Frank. "It is certainly the only way out of the scrape."

With his mind made up to this, the great inventor started to go into the pilot-house and see how his prisoner was.

But before he could reach the pilot-house door, he heard a shrill feminine scream break upon the air of the valley.

"Oh, Mr. Reade! Save me—save me!"

Astounded beyond measure, Frank turned, and, glancing upward, beheld a thrilling sight.

Far up on the mountain wall was a projecting ledge of rock. Upon this ledge was a young girl, fair as a lily.

She was struggling in the grasp of a giant Mongolian. One moment only was she visible, and then she was dragged from sight.

"My God! that is Myrtle Osborne!" gasped the amazed and horrified inventor. "What is she doing here? What can it mean?"

There was only one answer. She was in distress, and he must without question fly to her aid.

## CHAPTER L.

### RESCUED FROM A RUFFIANLY CREW.

FRANK READE, JR., was quick to act. He sprang into the pilot-house and set the rotascopes in motion.

The air-ship arose and sailed up the mountain side. The place where the young girl had been seen was passed, but no sign of her or her captors was visible.

Frank scoured the whole mountain side with the air-ship.

Sailing over the tops of the trees it was not a difficult matter for him to investigate every part of the forest. But his quest was unrewarded.

Not a sign of the young girl was visible. She had disappeared as if swallowed up. What did it mean?

Frank could think of no method by which the Mongolian could have traveled any great distance in that length of time with his fair prize.

"He is in hiding somewhere," he muttered. "There is undoubtedly a cave or some retreat near here."

For a time the young inventor was quite at a loss as to what it was best to do. But while thus deliberating he heard a voice just behind him.

It was Wing Ho.

The villain had arose upon his elbow and altogether presented quite a crushed and humiliated appearance. All of his former defiance seemed to have fled.

"Frank Reade," he said, in a very humble voice, "I am ready to surrender. Do with me just what ye will."

"Oh, you are, eh?" said Frank, coolly.

"That is most kind of you. I don't see how a man who is already a prisoner is going to surrender, however."

"Well, I mean that I'll agree to anything ye say," amended Wing Ho.

"Ah! then you come to my terms?"

"Exactly."

"Very well," said Frank, brusquely. "We'll talk that over very soon."

The young inventor went out of the pilot-house and closed the door. He leaned over the rail and studied the face of the country below.

Then he made up his mind to a somewhat risky move.

Returning to the pilot-house, he sailed the air-ship over to the place where he had seen Myrtle Osborne. Here he selected a good spot and allowed the air-ship to rest upon the ground.

He threw out the anchors, so that in case of any accident or high wind the ship could not depart of itself.

Then he descended into the Eclipse's hold. Here he opened a small door in the hull.

He stepped out into the open air, taking care not to come in contact with the heavily-charged steel hull. He was armed with a Winchester and small arms.

It was a risky move, but Frank could see no other or better one. He was determined, if possible, to rescue Myrtle Osborne.

Accordingly, he crept up to the rocky shelf where he had seen her.

Fortunately, here the soil was very soft and yielding, and foot-prints were easily visible. Frank bent down and examined them.

To his surprise, he saw that there were marks of many feet.

In fact, a well-trodden path led up through a growth of pines. He quickly scaled it.

Ascending fully two hundred feet, he came to the face of a high cliff which was completely covered with ivy. The path ended right at the base of the cliff.

For an instant Frank was puzzled. Then he lifted a portion of the clinging vines and gave a sharp cry of surprise and gratification as well.

The mouth of a cavern was revealed. How far it extended into the mountain Frank had no means of knowing.

But he had not the slightest doubt that it was into this cavern that Myrtle had been dragged by the Mongolian ruffian. At once and without a particle of fear Frank entered the place.

It was a long, dark passage, apparently leading into the hill. Frank crept into it boldly, and after turning several angles saw a light ahead.

It was firelight and the odor of burning pine came to his nostrils. Frank saw shadowy forms moving about a cavern chamber several hundred feet further on.

The great inventor was now all agog with interest. Such a thing as fear did not trouble him.

He crept on cautiously, keeping in the shadows close to the wall of the passage. Soon he had reached a position from which he could gaze upon a thrilling scene.

A fire burned in the center of the cavern chamber. This dimly lit up the surroundings.

About this fire six huge Mongolian bandits were grouped, engaged in excited talk or glibberish, while several pieces of meat were cooking in the embers. But Frank's gaze rested upon them only a moment, to be transferred to a more thrilling sight.

A large iron ring was fastened into the rock wall of the cavern, and to this, with a heavy chain about her slender ankle, was fettered the fair girl captive, Myrtle Osborne.

She crouched, a figure of abject terror and misery, against the cavern wall. Frank's heart went out to her and his blood boiled in his veins.

"Ruffians!" he muttered. "They evidently



intend holding her for ransom. But I will cheat them of that."

Yet this was not so easy a thing to do, as the young inventor was soon prone to admit.

Six Mongolian giants pitted against one slight-built man like himself were odds not very likely to be easily overcome.

But Frank was determined not to be beaten. He had come into the place to rescue Myrtle and he would risk his life to do it.

But fortune favored him.

Time passed, and finally, after dispatching their meal like savage gourmands, the giants stretched themselves out about the fire. It was evidently their purpose to go to sleep.

Frank realized this with a thrill of joy. It seemed like a golden opportunity.

The Mongolians evidently had no fear of foes invading the place, for none remained on guard. In a short while Frank became assured that they were all asleep.

Feeling sure of this he stepped boldly out into the firelight.

At sight of him Myrtle Osborne sprang up and a wild, glad cry was upon her lips, but Frank, with a quick motion of his hand restrained it.

The next moment he was by her side. It was but a moment's work to undo the shackling upon her ankle and then she fell, half fainting, into his arms.

"You must be strong," whispered Frank. "All depends on you for our escape."

"Oh, Mr. Reade," she whispered in reply, "you cannot know what I have suffered. But I will be strong, have no fear."

Regaining her composure now, Myrtle suffered herself to be led out of the circle of firelight by Frank Reade, Jr. Soon they were traversing the cavern passage.

"What a merciful Providence brought you to my rescue," said Myrtle, as they hurried on. "Oh, I think those monsters would have murdered me very soon!"

"No doubt of it," replied Frank.

Then a chilling sound came to his ears.

"Come, Myrtle," he said, in a voice of steel.

"You must run as fast as you can. They have discovered our escape!"

The angry cries of the Mongolians could be heard in their rear. But they were now at the mouth of the cavern.

Frank believed that they would succeed in escaping. He knew it was but a little ways to the air-ship. They would surely reach it.

Now they were in the open air. Down through the pines they rushed. The next moment Frank looked for the air-ship.

He stopped as if struck a sudden blow. There was the spot where it had alighted, but it was not there now. The air-ship was gone.

## CHAPTER LI.

### A SEA FIGHT—RESCUED.

As Barney pointed to the harbor entrance Jack, Will and Mortimer looked in the direction indicated and beheld a thrilling sight.

A large ship was seen coming into the harbor.

It was built after the Chinese pattern, with lateen sails and hand rudder, but its sides fairly bristled with guns.

Every masthead and yard was hung with yellow flags. It was plain to any one that the new-comer was a Chinese ship-of-war.

What did it mean? Had the Emperor of China sent it? It looked possible that such was the case, and that the mission of the war-ship was to assist in destroying Wing Ho's gang of pirates.

The appearance of the Chinese war-ship did

not seem to have any serious effect upon the pirates, however.

The reason of this became apparent later to our friends. The truth was the Chinese war-ships are more formidable-looking than really formidable, and any one of the pirate junks would not hesitate to cope with her.

Therefore the pirate junk continued to throw shell until the war-ship came about and gave her a broadside.

No damage was done the junk, however, beyond the loss of a yard, which spoke well for the emperor's gunners at that short range.

A wild yell went up from the pirates, out from the cavern came a second junk, and both opened fire upon the war-ship.

Mercy! how the shot and shell whizzed across the water.

"Bejabers, the war-ship is no good!" cried Barney, excitedly. "Wud yez luk at that, now. She's thyring to escape."

This was the truth. The war-ship had evidently come to the conclusion that it was most too warm a hole for her and was trying to beat out of the harbor.

But the second pirate junk had been edging around and now cut her off. The war-ship had been entrapped.

The excitement of our American friends can be better imagined than described.

"If that is the kind of fighting the emperor's ships do, I don't see what is to prevent the pirates from capturing Hong Kong itself," cried Will Deane, with disgust.

"The Chinese navy always was weak," declared Mortimer; "the Chinese are better fighters on land than on water."

"They're no good anywhere," declared Jack Clark, sentimentally.

The fight was now waxing hot about the war-ship. Her crew had evidently come to the conclusion that their lives depended upon the result and they were doing better.

Shot and shell flew about promiscuously. Suddenly a wild cheer went up from the emperor's soldiers on shore.

One of the junks was seen to be sinking. The war-ship had got in one effective shot and it had scuttled the junk.

But the other junk had come alongside and grappled with the war-ship. The pirates could be seen boarding the war-ship and a desperate hand-to-hand conflict was in progress.

But suddenly it occurred to Will Deane that they were losing a mighty opportunity in remaining here watching the sea fight.

"Why, now's our chance!" he cried. "Let us make a strike for the cavern and clean it out. The pirates won't have the junks to help them now."

This was certainly a proper move. It was interpreted to the Chinese lieutenant from Kiang Chu, who at once gave the order to go forward on the charge.

Now that the shelling from the junk was discontinued, it was an easy matter for the emperor's soldiers to clear the pass.

They pushed through and reached the sandy beach beyond.

Of course they were met with a heavy fire from pirates concealed along the shore, but these were dislodged and driven back to the cavern.

On went the victorious soldiers. At the cavern entrance a desperate fight ensued.

The pirates made a determined and desperate resistance, but the emperor's soldiers displayed great valor and slowly but surely drove them back.

The fight was carried into the cavern, and

the pirates retreated slowly into the passage which led up to the cliff above.

Here, however, they made a desperate stand and could not be dislodged. No effort could drive them further.

Leaving the scene of battle, Barney and the three young men began a quest for the prisoners.

In a cavern chamber, guarded by six pirates, armed to the teeth, they were confined. The guards, however, with lack of valor, fled at approach of the rescuers.

The next moment Barney and his companions burst into the chamber, and a great cheer went up from the prisoners.

In less time than it takes to tell it their bonds were cut, and mutual expressions of joy were exchanged.

Barney and Pomp, in the exuberance of their joy, embraced each other, and together danced a regular war dance.

"Bress yo' heart, I'ish!" cried the black man, delightedly. "Yo' am jes' as handsome as eber yo' was. I'se done glad to see yo', honey, 'deed I is."

"Begorra, I've been thinkin' of yez night an' day, me gosssoon," cried Barney. "An' if yez was me own brother or me cousin, I couldn't have felt worse whin I heerd yez was in the inimies' hands."

Will Deane, Jack Clark and Mortimer shook hands warmly with Dr. Vaneyke, Prince Kong and Caleb Squeers.

Sam Hop was engrossed in watching Barney and Pomp.

"Ilishman an' blackee man belly glad to see each other. No glad to see Sam Hop?" he cried.

Barney swooped down upon him like a thunderbolt. Catching the diminutive Celestial by the pig-tail, he gave him a swing which sent Sam revolving like a top.

"Bejabers, I niver was so glad to see any one in all me loife!" cried Barney, with roars of laughter. "If ye was only a leetle pootier, Chináyser, I'd hug ye for very delight."

Pomp nearly split his sides with laughter.

"I jes' tole yo' we'se bery glad fo' to see yo', Chineel!" he cried, with ears rolling down his black cheeks. "Don' yo' fink we is berry glad?"

"Stoppee—stoppee!" shrieked Sam Hop, wildly. "Ilishman killee Sam Hop. No likee dat—pullee pig-tail no good. Ilishman—me blakee head, no stoppee!"

Then Sam began to lay about him lustily. He was no slouch in a rough and tumble, if he was small, and Barney and Pomp were fain to beat a retreat.

But at this moment a cry of dismay escaped the lips of Will Deane.

"Great heavens!" he cried. "What does that mean? It looks like defeat. The emperor's soldiers are being beaten back. The war-ship has been sunk, and the junk is coming up here to give us a dose. I tell you we are doomed if we don't get back over that ridge in double-quick time!"

This was true.

The emperor's soldiers were retreating in wild confusion. If the junk should get into position to rake the beach, the emperor's soldiers would be wiped out of existence.

It was a critical moment.

Our friends took the cue at once and began to beat a hasty retreat. Out of the cavern they rushed, in the van of the fleeing soldiers.

The one hope of salvation now was in gaining the protection and cover of the ridge about the waters of the bay. But it seemed as if they never would have time for this.



The junk had come about in position to rake the beach when a thrilling cry went up from Barney. He pointed upward into the air.

Everybody looked up and were thrilled. There, not one thousand feet above them, floated majestically, like a mighty bird of prey, the air-ship.

## CHAPTER LII.

### A PLUCKY FIGHT.

FRANK READE, JR.'s sensations upon making the appalling discovery that the air-ship was gone cannot be expressed in words.

He was literally stupefied for a moment. What did it mean? What awful trickery was this? Was it the work of Wing Ho? Had the pirate chief succeeded in liberating himself and sailed off with the Eclipse?

It was too horrible a thought to entertain. But there was no further time to dwell upon the subject.

Exigencies of the present demanded attention. The foe were coming in hot pursuit.

The six Mongolian giants were coming down through the pines. They were furious with rage.

Frank knew that it was to be a life or death struggle. He gripped his Winchester, and said to Myrtle:

"Crouch down behind that rock, and keep perfectly quiet. If I can whip them we are saved. If not—"

Frank's teeth shut with a snap. He would not think of death at this supreme moment when he had gone through so much and had actually succeeded in rescuing Myrtle.

He faced the Mongolians like a lion at bay.

The brutes were yelling with fiendish triumph and rage as they came leaping down the hillside.

It was folly to think of coping successfully at close quarters with these giants.

Frank knew it well and he made quick action.

"May God help us!" he muttered.

He threw his rifle to his shoulder and took quick aim. There was an instant of waiting and then—

Crack! The rifle spoke sharply. The aim was true. One of the giants fell in a heap.

Five were left, however. But the young inventor pulled the lever quickly, which threw a fresh cartridge into the breech of the repeater.

Once more he aimed.

Crack!

Another giant fell. Only four were left. But they were every moment drawing nearer. Closer quarters would be fatal. Only lightning action would save him.

Frank Reade, Jr., knew it well and acted accordingly. Quick as a flash another cartridge flew into the breech.

Had the giants been other than the ignorant, unreasoning brutes that they were, they would have been impressed with the fatality of that rifle in Frank's hands.

But they were wholly impervious to fear. They never deviated in their course. Again the repeating rifle spoke.

A third giant threw up his arms and fell. Only three were left. Frank now changed his tactics.

He started down the mountain side on a run. Of course the giants came on all the faster. They gained on him at every stride.

Nearer they drew. But Frank's purpose was to if possible gain time to reload his rifle. He managed to extract a cartridge from his belt and thrust it into the breech.

Quick as a flash he fired again. The aim was deadly and another Mongolian bit the dust.

Two only were left. But Frank had not time to again reload his rifle before they were upon him.

Fortune aided the brave inventor. They were near a precipice, and as the giants rushed upon him, Frank skillfully dodged, threw out his foot and sent one of the giants over the edge. Down went the brute to a frightful death on jagged rocks below.

The sole remaining giant halted. He had seen the fate of his comrade and now turned to see where his other companions were.

He saw them all lying dead on the mountain path. He glanced at them in stupefaction and then at Frank Reade, Jr.

It was all too much for his ignorant, superstitious nature. He gave a hoarse grunt and then turned and incontinently fled.

Frank Reade, Jr., made no move to pursue him.

He drew a deep breath of most ineffable relief. Indeed, it was a wonderful battle which he had fought, and he had certainly come off victorious.

He felt jubilant indeed, and satisfied that he had nothing more to fear, he hastened up the mountain side to rejoin Myrtle.

The young girl had seen the whole affair with sensations of a thrilling sort.

Her prayers of course had been with Frank Reade, Jr., and now in great joy she rushed to meet him.

"Oh, God has answered my prayers!" she cried, wildly. "We are saved! Indeed, it was your great bravery, Mr. Reade."

"Do not think that," replied Frank, modestly. "It was my exceeding good fortune. But it is very strange what has become of the air-ship."

"Did you leave it here?" asked the young girl.

"Indeed I did, and safely anchored, too. It seems very strange how it could have taken legs and walked away."

"Perhaps some foe came along and took it away," ventured Myrtle.

"No," replied Frank, decidedly; "that would be hardly likely, for they would not know how to make the thing rise."

"Indeed, then it is a mystery," said Myrtle; "but can you find no way to solve it?"

"I will try."

Frank started at once to climb the eminence. His purpose was to reach the highest point, from which he could command an extended view.

The air-ship was not in sight in the heavens.

Either the operator had gone too far to be visible, or he was keeping near the earth, behind some of the many hills around.

But Frank noted one fact which was partially explanatory, as he made his way up the mountain side.

There were uprooted shrubs and broken saplings, all of which would well indicate that the Eclipse had dragged her anchors.

The thought gave him increased hope, and Frank kept on rapidly until he reached the top of the eminence.

There a sight met his gaze which gave him a mighty thrill. The mystery was explained.

There, not two hundred yards below, was the air-ship, rocking uneasily in the air, fully fifty feet from the earth.

It was plain to see that the air-ship had dragged her anchors. But one thing puzzled Frank.

The rotascopes were revolving rapidly. He could swear that this had not been the case when he left the Eclipse.

A chilling thought struck him. Had some strangers got possession of the Eclipse, who had an understanding of its mechanism?

But if so, they were not visible. There was no evidence of life about the Eclipse. This was very strange.

Frank stood a moment gazing at the air-ship in a peculiar frame of mind.

Then he turned and beckoned to Myrtle. The young girl was quickly by his side. She gave him an inquisitive glance.

"I think we are all right," said Frank. "In some manner the air-ship has dragged her anchor. I think you had better remain here until I return."

"Very well, sir," replied Myrtle.

"You are not afraid?"

"Oh, no."

"I will return directly, and once you are safely on board the Eclipse, I think your troubles will be over for one while."

Myrtle's face flushed joyously, and she replied fervently:

"I hope so; but the others—"

"We will find them in due course," said Frank.

Then he started down the hill towards the Eclipse. He reached the anchor cable and placed his hand upon it.

There seemed no way to reach the ship except by climbing up this rope.

Frank did not hesitate.

At once he began to make his way hand over hand up the cable. But he was not ten feet from the ground when a thrilling thing happened.

The anchor cable beneath the tremendous strain of the rotascopes parted near the ground.

With a lightning bound the air-ship leaped into space.

Up it went like a rocket, and there at the end of forty feet of rope hung Frank Reade, Jr., dangling between heaven and earth.

It was a critical position indeed, and it did not seem as if his life at that moment was worth a straw.

"My God!" he groaned, with horror. "What shall I do?"

It was no easy matter now to climb up that slack rope. When it had been taut the feat was much easier.

Up, up shot the air-ship. The earth was hundreds of feet below.

It seemed for a time as if Frank must lose his grip and fall. The swaying of the air-ship caused him to spin about in mid-air, until it seemed as if the awful dizziness must overcome him. Once the young inventor closed his eyes in expectation of falling.

## CHAPTER LIII.

### IN MID-AIR.

HAD Frank Reade, Jr., been less the daring spirit that he was, and less accustomed to experiences of the sort, he would certainly have lost his grip and been dashed into eternity.

Straining every muscle, he made his way slowly up the swinging, gyrating rope.

Already the air was growing so chilly that his fingers were becoming benumbed. Frank knew that unless he could reach the deck very soon he would succumb to the rarefied air.

But he was every moment drawing nearer. Already the rail was almost within his grasp.

He rested a moment, and then put all his strength into the final exertion. It was the last effort. Upon its result hung his life.



His fingers closed over the rail. With a mighty effort he drew himself up and then sank down upon the deck.

He was safe. He had accomplished the terrible feat.

The strain made him sick and faint for a moment. But he quickly recovered, and then crawled toward the pilot-house.

Upon the floor with contorted feet lay Wing Ho. At a glance Frank saw that he was dead.

He had managed in some manner to stretch his bonds sufficiently to reach Lever No 7 and turn it.

But in the very act he had come in contact with a live wire, and the powerful electric current surging through his body had stopped the action of the heart.

For a moment Frank was quite overcome with the reflection.

But he knew that his own life depended upon prompt action.

He hastily reversed Lever No. 7, and at once the air-ship ceased its upward flight and began to descend.

Frank in the pilot-house held the wheel, and as near as possible judged the locality where he had left Myrtle.

When one hundred feet from the earth, as good luck had it, he saw the young girl standing on a part of the cliff.

At once Frank lowered the Eclipse to the earth. When the air-ship rested upon the ground he secured the lever, and then lowering the gang-ladder, went out to meet his fair passenger.

Myrtle, with pallid face and excited manner, came aboard.

"Oh, I prayed for you!" she exclaimed, with emotion. "I so feared that you would lose your hold and fall. Was it not terrible?"

"Well, it was a ticklish experience," admitted Frank, "but I pulled through all right. Now, Miss Myrtle, if you will make yourself comfortable aboard the Eclipse we will return at once to Kiang Chu and your friends."

"I thank you," replied the young girl. "Ah, we all owe very much to you, Mr. Reade."

"You owe me nothing," cried Frank, warmly. "I am too glad to serve you."

Frank went at once to the pilot-house. At once he set his course for the Chinese fort.

When at length, after a swift voyage, Kiang Chu became visible, Myrtle came on deck and went to the rail.

The young girl looked eagerly for some sign of her friends as the air-ship settled down over the fort.

But only a handful of men were upon the ramparts.

Frank was surprised at this. But holding the air-ship suspended within speaking distance he went to the rail and hailed the fort.

"Hello!" he shouted in English. "Where are the Americans?"

But not one of the soldiers could understand English. They shook their heads and gesticulated.

"This is queer!" exclaimed Frank, in deep concern. "The place seems practically deserted. I wonder where everybody is?"

At length Frank resorted to signs. In this he was more successful.

All that Frank could gather from the sign talk, however, was the information that the commandant of the fort, with his force of soldiers and the Americans, had gone somewhere.

Where, was a puzzle. But one of the soldiers pointed to the eastward and a light broke across Frank's mind.

"Ah, I have it!" he cried; "doubtless they

have gone to attack the Chinese pirates in their den. It would be a favorable time."

Satisfied of this, Frank sprang into the pilot-house and set the Eclipse flying toward the pirates' stronghold.

It was at the moment when the victory of Li Ching's soldiers had been turned into defeat.

With the junk ready to open her guns upon the fleeing soldiers, the result would have been a terrible massacre.

It is doubtful if one of the party would have escaped to tell the tale. They were in a fearful trap of death.

Barney, looking up, gave the wild cry which raised the hopes of all:

"The air-ship! We are saved!"

It was like being called back from the grave. Certainly rescue was now certain.

And Frank Reade, Jr., at the rail of the air-ship, saw the whole critical situation at a glance.

Into the cabin he sprang and came out with a handful of the electric bombs.

One of these he sent whizzing down to the deck of the junk below.

There was a terrific explosion and the whole deck was literally blown up. The junk careened in the water and the affrighted pirates began to leap overboard in dismay.

One more bomb Frank sent hurtling down through the air.

Another explosion followed and the junk was seen to sink rapidly beneath the waves.

A great cheer went up from the emperor's soldiers.

Infused with new ardor and courage they rallied and turned upon their pursuers. It was a complete turning of tables.

Pen cannot describe adequately the triumph of the emperor's soldiers.

They cheered themselves hoarse and behaved more like wild men than anything else.

The air-ship settled down upon the sandy beach and in a moment the Americans were rushing aboard.

The meeting was a joyous one.

Handsome Jack Clark clasped Myrtle to his breast. Will Deane and Mortimer Osborne, the young girl's brother, followed.

Dr. Vaneyke and Barney rushed forward and embraced Frank Reade, Jr. Pomp came in his turn.

Caleb Squeers, Prince Kong and Sam Hop were on hand, and altogether it was a most joyful reunion.

Through many thrilling adventures they had all passed, and ties of the warmest sort had been formed.

But alas! ties are made in this life only to be broken.

No sooner had the reuniting occurred than talk of separation was immediately begun.

Now that the Daisy's party were all safe out of the clutches of the Chinese pirates they naturally began to think of home.

It was decided to start at once, and preparations to that end were at once made.

#### CHAPTER LIV.

#### WHICH IS THE END.

PRINCE KONG was the most deeply gratified of anybody with the result of the battle with the pirates.

One most deadly nest of the vipers which are the curse of the Yellow Sea had been wiped out of existence.

The prince was fully cognizant of the fact that all this could not have been so easily done without the aid of the air-ship.

At once he went to Frank Reade, Jr., and said:

"Mr. Reade, the Chinese government will pay you any price in gold if you will co-operate with them with your air-ship for the total extinction of the pirates on this entire coast."

"Prince," replied Frank, warmly, "I deeply appreciate the kindness of your offer, but I must respectfully decline."

"Then you will not accept?"

"No."

"Why?"

"My mission to China was not to exterminate the pirates of China but to rescue my imprisoned countrymen. I have performed my mission and now duty demands that I go to my home."

"I am very sorry," said the prince, disappointedly, "but you will stop in Hong Kong and allow me to present you to the emperor."

"I will be glad to accept the honor," replied Frank.

The subject dropped with this.

The body of Wing Ho was buried on the bluff. Then Li Ching and his soldiers returned to Kiang Chu.

They fired a parting salute to the air-ship and Frank exploded an electric bomb.

Prince Kong accepted Frank's invitation to return to Hong Kong on board the air-ship.

Arrived there after a swift voyage the whole city was decorated as for a fete.

Chinese bands paraded the streets, everybody was in high spirits and a regular gala time ensued.

By the emperor's orders, one of the public squares before the Pagoda Mi was cleared and a cordon of soldiers encircled it.

Here the air-ship alighted and the distinguished inventor, Frank Reade, Jr., met the emperor of the Flowery Kingdom.

The emperor proved to be quite a jolly old fellow, and with Prince Kong for interpreter, examined the wonderful air-ship.

The great ruler of the pigtailed was deeply impressed, and, through Prince Kong, made a magnificent offer for the Eclipse as an aerial coach for himself.

But Frank, of course, promptly declined it.

Two days were spent in Hong Kong.

The Daisy's party here took leave of the air-ship and its crew, going aboard a Pacific Mail steamer for San Francisco.

The parting was a sad one, for dear, indeed, was the friendship formed. But all promised to visit Frank at Readestown.

Caleb Squeers was right in his element.

He made most voluminous notes, and declared, with confidence:

"I tell you, my book will electrify the world."

Barney and Pomp could not resist a golden opportunity to play a prank upon Poor Sam Hop, whom Frank had engaged to return to America with him as a cook.

It was the custom of every Celestial of low degree to fall upon his face in the presence of the emperor.

Barney and Pomp knew this well enough, and before Sam awoke from his nap that morning, they skillfully doctored the knees of his trousers with sharp brads.

Accordingly, when the emperor came aboard Sam Hop rushed forward and threw himself upon his knees. The next moment with a yell of agony he sprang up.

In an instant two of the emperor's guard had poor Sam by the scruff of the neck. They would no doubt have killed him on the spot if it had not been for Prince Kong.

Poor Sam, disgraced and terrified, crept



away into the galley, while the mischief makers, Barney and Pomp, laughed themselves hoarse over what they reckoned a brilliant joke.

Two days later, the Eclipse had been taken apart and was stored safely in the hold of a home-bound steamer.

In due time San Francisco was reached. The fame of the Eclipse had preceded it, and the Golden Gate city was in a furore over the coming of the air-ship.

The Eclipse was once more unloaded and put together.

Then Frank treated the mayor and dignita-

ries of San Francisco to a trip in the air.

Finally leaving San Francisco the final flight homeward was made.

In due time the Eclipse appeared over Readestown. A great crowd was in attendance to welcome the return of the air-ship from its successful trip to China.

Down into the great yard of the machine shops settled the air-ship.

The dynamo was cut off, the generating jars emptied, and the Eclipse stowed away carefully, and thus came to an end Frank Reade, Jr.'s latest and most famous trip.

Frank's wife met him with tears of joy.

The young inventor retired to his own home, to enjoy for a time the comforts and joys of domestic life.

And Barney and Pomp assumed their old-time duties about the machine shops. All in the Daisy's party were heard from frequently, and Caleb Squeers went back to New York the lion of his profession.

And here we will leave them all with the presumption that possibly at some future day, Frank Reade, Jr., may again appear with a new invention and afford the chronicler fresh material for a story even more exciting than this one which we now bring to

[THE END.]

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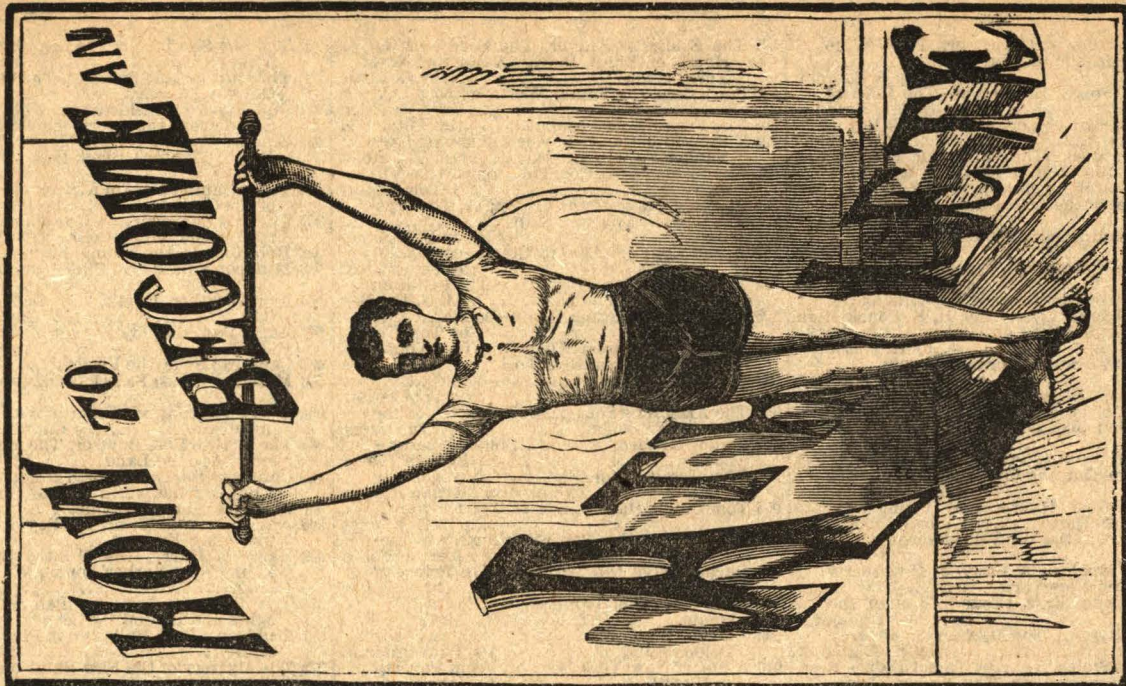
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